NATION

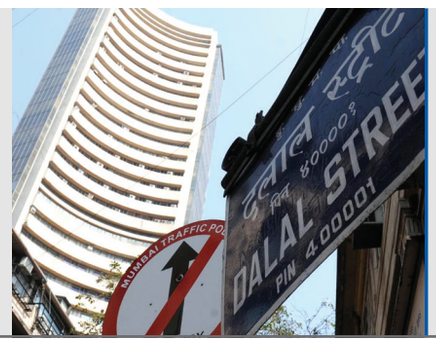
Hindus offer prayers as ASI survey continues at Bhojshala

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Markets dip on foreign fund outflows

≫ Page: 7 ≪



SPORTS

Both MI and SRH look to make winning comebacks

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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Respect territory: India slams China

This comes as India backs Philippines' sovereignty

BEIJING, 26 MARCH

China on Tuesday urged India to respect its sovereignty claims and maritime interests over the disputed South China Sea where it is currently locked in a bitter row with the Philippines. It said that "third parties" have no right "whatso ever" to interfere.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said this while replying to a question at a media briefing here on the remarks made by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar that India supports the sovereignty of the Philippines.

"We urge relevant parties to squarely face the facts and truth on the South China Sea issue, and respect China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests and the efforts of regional countries to keep the South China Sea peaceful and stable," he said. Jaishankar is currently in Manila on an official visit during which he held talks with Philippines Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo.

India firmly supports the Philippines in upholding its national sovereignty and wants to explore new areas of cooperation, including in defence and security, Jaishankar said earlier in Manila amid the Southeast Asian nation's maritime dispute with China in the South China Sea.

S Jaishankar and Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo shake hands after a press conference in Manila, Philippines on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

- China says the Philippines deliberately grounded a warship in 1999.

China claims most of the South China Sea as its own, while Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims over the maritime area.

Currently, China and the Philippines are engaged in a bitter row as the coast guard ships of both countries jostled to assert their claim over the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea, which both claim as part of theirs.

China complained during the weekend that the Philippines had sent two coastguard vessels and a supply ship to "transport construction materials" to an old warship grounded on the reef.

China says the Philippines deliberately grounded a warship in 1999. Manila, for its part, accused the Chinese coastguards of blocking their ship and using water cannons.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 4

KICKING UP A STINK

Security personnel detain AAP workers during their protest outside Patel Chowk metro station against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in New Delhi, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Unable to repay loan, farmer ends life in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 26 MARCH

A farmer from Koila village in Kadaba taluk of Dakshina Kannada district died by suicide after being unable to repay the loan which he had taken for agricultural purposes. According to police, the deceased Shivanna Gowda, 61, residing in Budalur, reportedly consumed poison. His son, Hemant Gowda, has lodged a complaint with the Kadaba police, attributing his father's suicide to the burden of debt weighing heavily on him.

—Salar News

Adani to acquire 95% stake in Odisha Port for Rs 1,349 cr

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Tuesday announced the acquisition of a 95 per cent stake in Gopalpur Ports in Odisha from Shapoorji Pallonji Group and Orissa Stevedores Ltd at an equity value of Rs 1,349 crore. In Gopalpur Ports, Shapoorji Pallonji Group (SP Group) firm SP Port Maintenance Pvt Ltd has a 56 per cent stake and Orissa Stevedores Ltd (OSL) has a 44 per cent stake. Gopalpur Port is an all-weather deep-water berthing port with a capacity of 20 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) situated in Ganjam district of Odisha. APSEZ said the equity consideration for a 95 per cent stake is Rs 1,349 crore.

—PTI

Now, 31 March last date for CUET-UG application

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The application deadline for Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG has been extended till 31 March, UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar announced on Tuesday. Earlier, the deadline was till 11pm on Tuesday. "The deadline for online submission of the application form for the CUET-UG 2024 has been extended up to 9.50 PM on 31 March, 2024 based on the request received from candidates and other stakeholders," he said.

—PTI

EC to act on Deve Gowda's freebies plaint

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Election Commission has directed chief electoral officer to take "immediate action" on a complaint filed by JD (S) president HD Deve Gowda against freebies.

HD Deve Gowda alleged Congress MP DK Suresh was planning distribution of freebies and the State poll machinery failed to take swift action.

In a letter to the State CEO, EC asked him to take action keeping in mind the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct and relevant laws, and sought a compliance report at the earliest. EC letter was sent out on 21 March based on a complaint of Gowda to the poll panel. He alleged that the freebies were removed from a godown as the field machinery failed to take appropriate action.

"There is not only dereliction of duties by the concerned officer but the officers are afraid of taking action against the present MP, who is the brother of D K Shivkumar, deputy chief minister," Gowda alleged.

—PTI

Deve Gowda **PHOTO: PTI**

There is not only dereliction of duties by the concerned officer but the officers are afraid of taking action against the present MP
-HD Deve Gowda, JD (S) President

NZ accuses China of cyber attack after US

WELLINGTON, 26 MARCH

Hackers linked to the Chinese government launched a state-sponsored operation that targeted New Zealand's Parliament in 2021, the country's security minister said on Tuesday.

New Zealand's allegation comes a day after American and British authorities announced a set of criminal charges and sanctions against seven hackers, all believed to be living in China, who targeted US officials, journalists, corporations and pro-democracy activists, as well as the UK's election watchdog.

"The use of cyber-enabled espionage operations to interfere with democratic institutions and processes anywhere is unacceptable," Judith Collins, the Defence Minister responsible for the Government Communications Security Bureau, said in a statement.

The bureau's National Cyber Security Centre "completed a robust technical assessment" following a compromise of the Parliamentary Counsel Office and the Parliamentary Service in 2021, and has attributed this activity to a PRC (China) state-sponsored group known as APT40," Collins said. Foreign Minister Winston Peters confirmed New Zealand's concerns had been conveyed to Chinese Ambassador Wang Xiaolong.

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian dismissed the allegations as "typical political manipulation" concocted by the US and UK, with whom it is in conflict over issues including Taiwan.

—PTI

AS NDA CANDIDATE

HDK to contest Lok Sabha polls from Mandya

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Janata Dal (Secular) leader and former Chief Minister of Karnataka, HD Kumaraswamy, confirmed on Tuesday that he will contest the Lok Sabha elections as BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate from Mandya Lok Sabha constituency.

"Today, my decision is to contest from Mandya for the upcoming elections. BJP leaders advised me to contest from Mandya. Most of the party workers from Mandya also insisted. I will file a nomination and then campaign in the State," Kumaraswamy said while addressing a press conference in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

"Ramnagar district gave me political birth. Mysuru and Mandya gave me political power.

JD(S) did not lose morally in the last 2019 Lok Sabha elections. I have made many contributions to the development of the Ramnagar district. My heart has been treated three times in 12 years. It is the will of the gods and goddesses that this country needs me. God has been protecting me for that," he said.

He further said that JD(S) joined NDA to 'solve' the State's problems while alleging that the alliance with Congress earlier failed the party.

Speaking of the party's remaining two seats, Hassan and Kolar, Kumaraswamy said, "There is no change in Hassan Lok Sabha constituency (Prajwal Revanna JDS MP), and the JD(S) candidate for Kolar Lok Sabha constituency is still not finalised.

JD (S) leader further said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to hold a big rally in Bengaluru in the run-up to the elections.

Kumaraswamy also informed about his health and said that he will refrain from 'high voltage campaigning'.

Karnataka, which has 28 Lok Sabha seats, will vote in two phases on 26 April and 7 May.

—ANI

HD Kumaraswamy **PHOTO: PTI**

Today, my decision is to contest from Mandya for the upcoming elections. BJP leaders advised me to contest from Mandya. Most of the party workers from Mandya also insisted. I will file a nomination and then campaign in the State
-HD Kumaraswamy, former chief minister

22 INDIANS IN SHIP THAT COLLIDED WITH US BRIDGE

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The entire 22-member crew of the cargo ship that struck a major bridge in Baltimore on Tuesday, causing it to snap and plunge into the river below are Indians, the company said.

The "Dali" has a capacity of 10,000 TEU and onboard Units: of 4,679 TEU. Grace Ocean Private Ltd owns the vessel and the ship's movement was outbound from Baltimore to Colombo.

Owners and managers of the Singapore-flagged container ship "DALI" report that the vessel collided with one of the pillars of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, Baltimore, whilst under pilotage with two pilots onboard.

It said: "All crew members, including the two pilots, have been accounted for and there are no reports of any injuries. There has also been no pollution." The ship has now mobilised its Qualified Individual Incident Response service.

The US Coast Guard and local officials have been notified, and the owners and managers are fully cooperating with Federal and State government agencies under an approved plan. "We are horrified by what has happened in Baltimore, and our thoughts are with all of those affected," Maersk said in a statement.

"We can confirm that the container vessel is time chartered by Maersk and is carrying Maersk customers' cargo. No Maersk crew and personnel were onboard the vessel," the statement said. It was unclear what caused the cargo ship to crash into the bridge in the major American city just outside of Washington.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 6

FOR LADAKH STATEHOOD

Wangchuk ends 21-day-long hunger strike

LEH, 26 MARCH

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk on Tuesday evening ended his 21-day-long hunger strike in support of the demand for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Earlier in the day, he made a fresh appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fulfil the promises made to the people of the Union Territory and also called upon people to use their franchise in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections "very carefully" in the interest of the nation.

"The first phase of the hunger strike is ending today but this is not the end of the agitation," Wangchuk said after taking a glass of juice from a minor girl. "We will continue our struggle (in support of our demands). The gathering of 10,000 people at the venue and participation of over 60,000 others over the past 20 days are a testimony of the people's aspirations," he said.

He said the struggle is an issue not only concerning Ladakh but the whole country. "We do not think of Modi and Amit (Shah) as just politicians, we would rather like to think of them as statesmen and for that they will have to show some character and some farsightedness," he said.

Sonam Wangchuk speaks on the 21st day of his 'climate fast' in Leh on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Wangchuk has been on the "climate fast" in sub-zero temperatures since 6 March, a day after talks between joint representatives of Leh-based Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), which are jointly spearheading the agitation to demand statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule, and the central government hit a deadlock.

The Sixth Schedule contains provisions related to the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram through autonomous district councils. A three-day hunger strike, organised by the KDA in Kargil, also ended this evening. Meanwhile, actor Prakash Raj on Tuesday visited Wangchuk, extended his support to their protest.

—PTI

Kota NEET aspirant hangs self, 6th suicide since Jan

KOTA, 26 MARCH

- Uttar Pradesh native Mohammad Urooj was found hanging from a ceiling fan by a police team on Tuesday.

A 20-year-old NEET aspirant allegedly hanged himself at his PG accommodation here, the sixth suicide by a coaching student in the city since January, police said on Tuesday.

Uttar Pradesh native Mohammad Urooj was found hanging from a ceiling fan by a police team on Tuesday, Station House Office (Vigyan Nagar) Satish Chaudhary said.

He must have died by suicide in his room in Vigyan Nagar area during the intervening nights of Monday and Tuesday, he said, adding that the ceiling fan in the student's room was not equipped with anti -suicide device.

This is the sixth case of suicide by a coaching student in Kota since January. The number of student suicides in Kota stood at 26 in 2023.

According to the SHO, Urooj, a native of UP's Kannauj district, had been preparing for the medical college entrance exam at a coaching institute for the last one-and-a-half-year.

The student's parents got worried when he did not respond to their calls on Tuesday morning and they informed his friends and the guard at the accommodation, who called the police, he said.

No suicide note was recovered from the NEET aspitant's room.

If you need emotional support, please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777.

—PTI

Husband's cricket betting pushes wife to suicide

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

A woman who had died by suicide on March 18 was allegedly upset with her husband incurring huge losses over cricket betting, police said. Ranjitha from Chitradurga was found hanging at her residence on March 18. In his complaint to the police, her father Venkatesh alleged that his son-in-law Darshan Babu, an assistant engineer in the Minor Irrigation Department in Hosadurga had debts over Rs one crore. Venkatesh alleged Babu had the habit of betting in cricket, which led to the huge losses and eventually he was caught in a debt trap. Their financial position took a downturn and Ranjitha constantly received phone calls from money-lenders. This made her take the extreme step, her father alleged. The couple has a two-year-old son.
—PTI

CRIME BEAT

Bus conductor booked for assaulting woman

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

An FIR has been filed against a BMTC conductor for allegedly assaulting a woman passenger in BMTC bus number 368 from Bilekanahalli to Shivajinagar. The woman first slapped the conductor for not issuing the ticket and the conductor retaliated by thrashing her. Tanzula, 24, filed the complaint against Honappa, who is working at depot number 34, Kothanurudinne. The investigation is underway. Based on a video of the incident, BMTC has placed Agasar under suspension pending inquiry. Earlier this year, a woman named Sukanya filed a police complaint against a BMTC conductor at Bagalagunte police station after the conductor scratched her face during an argument over showing her Aadhaar card.
—Salar News

BBMP issues advisory on Karaga festival

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Commissioner Tushar Giri Nath on Tuesday ordered officials that necessary precautions should be taken to not violate Model Code of Conduct of Lok Sabha elections during Karaga festival in Bengaluru. The Karaga festival, which will be held between 15 and 23 April, attracts lakhs of devotees from far and wide. Chairing a preliminary meeting on the festival on Tuesday, Nath instructed officials to repair the footpath and roads on the Karaga yatra route and to install street lights. To take care of the cleanliness in the area, officers and staff of Solid Waste Management Department have been appointed. Installation of the surveillance camera has been ordered to avoid any untoward incident. Karaga Festival, an annual festival that celebrates the region's history and traditions, is held at Dharmarayaswamy Temple in Thigalarapet.
—Salar News

BSY downplays discontent in BJP over LS candidates

Jagadish Shettar's ticket has irked many BJP members

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Party's veteran leader BS Yediyurappa on Tuesday said efforts are on to resolve all the issues. This was amid simmering discontent within BJP in various constituencies, following the announcement of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls.

He will be visiting Davangere and Belagavi on Wednesday to resolve issues there.

Yediyurappa on Monday met outgoing Davangere MP GM Siddeshwar whose wife Gayatri is the BJP candidate from there.

Former party legislators MP Renukacharya and SA Ravindranath have been openly expressing their Opposition to her candidacy.

In the Belagavi Lok Sabha segment, there is resentment within the party over former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar being given the ticket.

Several local party leaders are opposing his candidature as Shettar, who is from Hubballi-Dharwad has been given the ticket, side-lining aspirants in Belagavi.

There is also some disgruntlement in several other constituencies, like Chikkaballapur, Koppal, Shivamogga, Haveri, Tumakuru, Bidar, Raichur and Chitradurga.

Yediyurappa to visit Davangere, Belagavi to resolve issues *PHOTO: PTI*

On Monday, Yediyurappa and other senior leaders of BJP held talks with sitting Koppal MP Karadi Sanganna who had threatened to revolt, after being denied the ticket to re-contest. The party gave the Koppal ticket to Basavaraj Kyavator.

A section of BJP workers protested against BJP's decision to field former minister K Sudhakar from Chikkaballapur. They were demanding a ticket for Alok, son of Yelahanka MLA S R Vishwanath.

Yediyurappa last week visited Tumakuru to meet a sulking former Minister JC Madhuswamy, who was upset over a ticket being given to V Somanna.

In Bidar, BJP MLAs Prabhu Chauhan and Sharanu Salgar are upset over the party re-nominating Union Minister Bhagwanth Khuba from there, despite their Opposition. In Shivamogga, another BJP veteran, KS Eshwarappa, has announced his candidature as an Independent against Yediyurappa's son and sitting MP BY Raghavendra. Eshwarappa has blamed Yediyurappa for the party denying the Haveri ticket to his son KE Kantesh, and instead picking former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai there.
—PTI

- In Belagavi Lok Sabha segment, there is resentment within the party over former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar being given the ticket. Several local party leaders are opposing his candidature as Shettar, who is from Hubballi-Dharwad has been given the ticket, side-lining aspirants in Belagavi.

'SLAP MODI' REMARK

BJP, Cong's war of words against Tangadagi

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Shivaraj Tangadagi *PHOTO: FB/ SHIVARAJ TANGADAGI*

BJP and Congress on Tuesday traded charges over Kannada and Culture Minister Shivaraj Tangadagi's remark that students and youths chanting 'Modi Modi' should be slapped.

Addressing Congress workers in Koppal on Sunday, Tangadagi said BJP leaders should be ashamed of seeking votes as they are incompetent to do even a single devWelopment work and failed to provide 2 crore jobs every year.

Senior BJP leader and party's former general secretary CT Ravi said it was a sacrilege on the part of Congress to assign a Culture portfolio to Tangadagi, who spoke in an uncultured manner.

Tangadagi said his statement in colloquial language was taken out of context. He asked whether BJP leaders can answer what happened to the Prime Minister's promise of 2 crore jobs every year.

"BJP is staging a demonstration based on my speech in a colloquial language. I challenge them to suspend Union Minister Anurag Singh Thakur for his statement that whoever protests against the prime minister should be shot dead," the minister said.

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi who is in the fray from Dharwad Lok Sabha constituency condemned the statement and said he was exploring legal options against Tangadagi.

"I ask the Congress party to show how strong your 'hand' is. Today, more than 70 to 80 per cent of youth are chanting 'Modi-Modi'. They are chanting on their own before Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister Siddaramiah.," Joshi told reporters in Hubballi.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar defended Tangadagi, saying that he made his statement in colloquial language and did not mean what he said.
—PTI

Women outnumber men voters in Mysuru and Kodagu LS seat

MYSURU, 26 MARCH

Women outnumber men to exercise their right to vote in Kodagu-Mysuru constituency in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The Mysuru-Kodagu Lok Sabha Constituency includes Piriyapatna, Hunsur, Chamundeshwari, Chamaraja, Krishnaraja and Narasimharaja Assembly constituencies in Mysuru district, and Madikeri and Virajpet Assembly seats in Kodagu district.

There are a total of 20,72,337 voters in the constituency, according to the registration till 9 March, 2024. Of this, 17,799 new voters were added between 21 January and 15 March, 2024.

There are a total of 2,36,562 voters in Madikeri Assembly constituency, of which 1,15,159 are male, 1,21,394 are female and 9 others. Virajpet Assembly constituency has a total of 2,29,592 voters, of which 1,13,319 are male, 1,16,266 are female and 7 others. There are 2,947 more women voters than men in this constituency. There are 9,182 more women voters than men in both the Assembly constituencies of Kodagu. There are 2,28,478 male and 2,37,660 female voters out of a total of 4,66,154 voters in both Kodagu Assembly constituencies.

There are a total of 1,97,215 voters in Piriyapatna Assembly constituency, of which 98,447 are male, 98,764 are female, and 4 are others. There are 317 more women voters than men in this constituency. There are a total of 2,46,508 voters in Hunsur Assembly constituency, of which 1,22,284 are male, 1,24,208 are female, and 16 are others. There are 1,924 more women voters than men in this constituency.

There are a total of 2,55,615 voters in the Krishnaraja Assembly constituency, of which 1,24,419 are male, 1,31,168 are female and 28 are others. There are 6,749 more women voters than men in this constituency.

Chamaraj Assembly constituency has a total of 2,54,925 voters, out of which 1,24,897 are male, 1,29,996 are female, and 32 are others. In other words, there are 5,099 more women voters than men in this constituency.

There are a total of 3,06,600 voters in Narasimharaja constituency, of which 1,47,505 are male, 1,59,043 are female and 52 are others. There are 11,538 more women voters than men in this constituency. Among the 8 Assembly constituencies in Mysuru-Kodagu Lok Sabha constituency, Chamundeshwari constituency of Mysuru district has the highest number of voters,
—Salar News

Congress Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha candidate Mansoor Ali Khan interacts with residents of Marathahalli, accompanied by party leaders Nagesh T, former DCC president G Shekar, former corporator Uday Kumar, Block President VTB Babu, and ward President Sathish Varthur in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

ESHWARAPPA TO FILE NOMINATION ON 12 APRIL

SHIVAMOGGA, 26 MARCH

Perturbed by the denial of Haveri Lok Sabha seat ticket to his son Kantesh, senior BJP leader KS Eshwarappa said he will file his nomination as an independent candidate from the constituency on 12 April.

"Even if Hari Hara Brahma descends, I shall contest the election without fail," and will win by a margin of 1 lakh votes, Eshwarappa said while addressing a gathering of his 25,000-odd supporters in Shivamogga city on Tuesday. BJP candidate BY Raghavendra will taste defeat in the constituency, he said.

Denouncing defection, Eshwarappa said he will be always committed to BJP's ideals. Dismissing the notion of caste politics, Eshwarappa underscored the evolving dynamics in Shikaripura constituency, where electoral margins have significantly dwindled.
—Salar News

Warm response to BJP over Modi wave: Bommai

HAVERI/BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

BJP candidates have been receiving tremendous response from voters because of a pro-Narendra Modi wave sweeping across State, former chief minister and Haveri BJP candidate Basavaraj Bommai said on Tuesday.

"BJP will have a star-studded campaign for Lok Sabha elections and the party is in talks with celebrities on this," Bommai said. There have been speculations that Kannada actor Kiccha Sudeepa will campaign for Bommai. Regarding the rebellion by Koppal sitting MP Karadi Sanganna, who was denied the ticket to contest the upcoming elections, Bommai said he held a discussion with Sanganna and he has agreed to toe by party's decision. "BS Yediyurappa is visiting Davangere to set things right and on Wednesday, he will go to Belagavi to urge voters to support Jagadish Shettar," he said. Shettar's candidature in Belagavi created chaos among the party workers and posters saying #GobackShetar were displayed across the constituency.

Basavaraj Bommai *PHOTO: PTI*

About the strategy chalked out by the party Bommai said every party have their strategies. "We too have a strategy but ultimately it is the voters who decide whom to support," he said.
—Salar News

Farmers' association to support Cong

MANDYA, 26 MARCH

Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) has said they will support Congress candidates in Lok Sabha elections in the State.

"We, the farmers, have resolved to spearhead a resolute campaign aimed at defeating BJP and its allied parties to safeguard the interests of the agrarian community," said Badgalpura Nagendra, State President of the farmers' union. Injustices have been inflicted upon the farming fraternity during the tenure of the Narendra Modi-led government, Nagendra said. The implementation of farm laws has exacerbated the hardships faced by farmers across the nation, he said.

State president, Badgalpura Nagendra *PHOTO: SALAR*

"At a recent farmers' conclave convened in Delhi, a consensus emerged to dislodge the NDA from power. The BJP-led government's track record of neglecting farmers' welfare has left us with no choice but to launch a concerted agitation to safeguard our livelihoods," Nagendra said.
—Salar News

HEBBAL ROAD TO BE A SLOW-MOVING JUNCTION FOR NEXT FOUR MONTHS

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

A portion of Hebbal Flyover will be closed for four months as Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) is adding two new tracks to it. The dismantling of two spans near the KR Puram loop joining the main track will lead to slow-moving traffic on Hebbal Road, according to a traffic advisory issued by City Traffic Police on Tuesday.

The commuters travelling from KR Puram side to the City are advised to use alternative routes such as IOC Junction-Mukunda Theatre Road, Lingarajapuram flyover route and Nagavara-Tannery Road route. Similarly, people entering the City from Hegdenagar-Thannisandra are advised to use GKVK-Jakkur Road to enter the City.
—Salar News

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

This City NGO quenches thirst of the voiceless

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

In a City like Bengaluru, battling rapid urbanisation and acute water scarcity, ensuring access to clean drinking water is a challenge not just for humans, but for animals as well. Water for Voiceless (WFV), a non-profit organisation founded in 2015, has been working to feed the animals.

WFV's journey began as a single man's initiative. Jain Sunny Hastimal, the founder of WFV, told Salar News "All of this started around nine years back when I accidentally ran over a puppy while driving. I tried to save it but after 5 days in a vet clinic, it died. After six months, I saw a similar puppy struggling to drink water from drainage. That is when I decided to keep water bowls and encouraged my friends and relatives to do the same. We have distributed more than 76,000 free water bowls to animal lovers and caretakers across 27 cities in 11 states. Imagine the countless birds and animals that have benefited from these bowls."

WFV is an organisation working for animals *PHOTO: SUPPLIED PICTURE*

"We've witnessed citizens who began by providing water, transform into compassionate advocates for animal welfare. This has fostered a spirit of kindness, with even children actively participating in animal welfare activities," Hastimal said.

Despite the water shortage in Bengaluru, WFV perseveres through their network of volunteers. "We have distribution points across the City and we only give water bowls. Our volunteers keep water bowls with them and refill them for stray animals. Even with the water shortage many people have ordered and taken water bowls," said Rahul A Bhutoria, a WFV team member. Funding remains a major hurdle for WFV as relies solely on donations and support from private individuals and organisations. "Like any other project, funds are crucial for our work. Thankfully, many generous individuals and organisations have donated to this noble cause, but financial constraints remain a constant battle," Bhutoria said.
—Salar News

Protect yourself from heatwave: Health Minister

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Tuesday advised the public to take measures to protect themselves against the rising temperatures in State.

The Health Minister said Commissioner of Health Department has instructed District Health Officers to ensure that all hospitals have medicines readily available for appropriate treatment in case of heat-related issues.

The Health Minister posted on X, "The summer heat is intensifying day by day in the State, and people are struggling to cope with the excessive heat. The maximum temperature has hovered around 40 degrees for the past month, leading to a surge in hospital visits due to various heat-related issues such as sunstroke, migraines, and skin problems.

"Additionally, there has been a significant increase in bacterial and viral infections. In response to the rising number of cases, the Commissioner of the Health Department has instructed District Health Officers to ensure that all hospitals have life-saving medicines readily available for appropriate treatment," the post read.

"I urge everyone to take precautionary measures to protect themselves from the heat. With summer coinciding with exam time, it is especially important for students to take extra care of their health," added the post.
—ANI

BJP NAMES NARASIMHA NAIK AS ITS CANDIDATE

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

BJP on Tuesday named former minister Narasimha Naik, also known as Raju Gowda, as its candidate for Shorapur Assembly bypoll, which is to be held on 7 May. The seat fell vacant due to the death of Congress MLA Raja Venkatappa Naik last month, and his son Raja Venugopal Naik has been named as the Congress candidate for the bypoll. Narasimha Naik was defeated by Raja Venkatappa Naik in the Assembly polls held last year.

Shorapur Assembly segment (ST reserved) had seen electoral battles between the late Raja Venkatappa Naik and Narasimha five times between 2004 and 2023, out of which the former won twice, 2013 and 2023, while the latter won thrice.
—ANI

BJP to go solo in LS polls in Punjab

Talks with Akali Dal end without alliance

CHANDIGARH, 26 MARCH

BJP on Tuesday announced that it will contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections on its own in Punjab, indicating an end to the negotiations for the revival of its alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).

With BJP deciding to go solo, the border state will see a four-cornered contest in the general elections. Polling for the 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab will be held on 1 June, the last phase of the seven-phase elections. This decision was taken based on the feedback of people, party workers and leaders. The decision has been taken for the future of Punjab and the betterment of the youth, farmers, traders, labourers and the downtrodden, he said.

He exuded confidence that the people of Punjab will further strengthen the BJP by voting for it in large numbers on 1 June.

The development comes almost a week after senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, when asked about the possibility of a tie-up with the SAD, had said, "Negotiations are on. We want all NDA parties to come together."

SAD Chief Sukhbir Singh Badal, however, had remained evasive on the issue of talks with the BJP. SAD had walked out of BJP-led NDA in September 2020 over the now-repealed farm laws. The two parties had formed an alliance in 1996 and had been fighting elections together. In 2019, they won two Lok Sabha seats each in Punjab.

Jakhar further said, "The work done by the BJP for Punjab under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not hidden from anyone." Each grain of farmers' crops was procured at minimum support price in the last 10 years and farmers received payments in their bank accounts within a week, he claimed.

The Kartarpur corridor, which people had been demanding for a long time to visit the Kartarpur gurdwara, was opened during the BJP government's tenure.

The Kartarpur corridor links Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan, the final resting place of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev, to Dera Baba Nanak shrine in Gurdaspur district. BJP was said to be demanding five to six of the 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab but the Akalis did not agree.

In an indication that it might go solo in the Lok Sabha polls, the SAD had passed a resolution at its core committee meeting on Friday saying it would "continue to put principles above politics". —*PTI*

Punjab BJP President Sunil Jakhar **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP fields ex-Cong MLAs in HP, Gujarat by-polls

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

BJP on Tuesday named its candidates for assembly by-polls in several states, fielding six disqualified MLAs of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly in the state days after they joined the party after leaving Congress. Several Gujarat MLAs, including four from Congress who joined BJP recently, have also been fielded by the party for by-polls necessitated by their resignations. In Himachal Pradesh, BJP has named Sudhir Sharma (Dharamshala), Ravi Thakur (Lahaul and Spiti), Rajinder Rana (Sujanpur), Inder Dutt Lakhanpal (Barsar), Chetanya Sharma (Gagret) and Devinder Kumar Bhutto (Kutlehar) as its candidates. In Gujarat, the BJP's candidates for by-polls to five seats include Arjun Modhvadiya, Chatursinh Chavda and Arvind Ladani. BJP also named its candidates for the by-polls to two seats in West Bengal and one seat in Karnataka, besides for nine assembly seats in Sikkim. Assembly elections in Sikkim are held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls, and BJP recently broke its alliance with the state's ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha. —*PTI*

Congress MP Ravneet Singh Bittu joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

BJP received a shot in the arm in Punjab on Tuesday as three-term Congress MP Ravneet Singh Bittu from the state joined the party, asserting that people have made up their mind to elect Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power again. He currently represents Ludhiana in the outgoing Lok Sabha. Joining BJP, he lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah among others stating they have a lot of affection for Punjab and want to do a lot for the state. Bittu said the people have made up their minds to elect BJP. —*PTI*

BJP nominates Manipur edu min to contest LS polls

IMPHAL, 26 MARCH

BJP on Tuesday nominated Manipur Education Minister Thounaojam Basantakumar Singh from the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat, dropping sitting MP and Union minister Rajkumar Ranjan Singh. "I thank all the members of the central election committee of BJP and state leaders for giving me this opportunity to contest the parliamentary polls," Singh said in a press conference at the party's state headquarters. Singh said his priority is to ensure that peace returns to the ethnic violence-hit north-eastern state and those who were displaced due to clashes can go back to their homes. The announcement comes two days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh claimed that BJP would win by a huge margin in the state. BJP candidate Singh is pitted against Congress nominee Angomcha Bimol Akoijam in the Inner Manipur seat. The saffron party has decided not to contest from the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency and extended its support to ally Naga. —*PTI*

BJP urges EC to take similar approach against poll breach

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

BJP on Tuesday raised the issue of objectionable comments by Opposition leaders, including Tamil Nadu minister Anitha Radhakrishnan, against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the lack of action against him, as it urged Election Commission to take stringent measures on its own against poll code violations. A BJP delegation flagged the "differing" approaches of poll officials in various states to similar infractions by politicians and claimed that not much is done against the errant leaders in states like Karnataka, Telangana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. All these states are ruled by the BJP's rival parties. —*PTI*

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma welcome former Congress leader Pranab Baruah **PHOTO: PTI**

Assam CM says Congress chief will join BJP soon

TEZPUR, 26 MARCH

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has claimed that state Congress President Bhupen Kumar Borah will join the saffron party by early next year.

Sarma termed the grand old party as a 'fixed deposit' of BJP, from which it draws members whenever needed. "I can say that by January-February 2025, Bhupen Borah will join BJP. I have kept two constituencies ready for him, though won't name those now," Sarma said, talking to reporters at the residence of the party's Sonitpur constituency candidate Ranjit Dutta on Monday evening.

Terming Opposition Congress a 'fixed deposit' of BJP, Sarma claimed that 'whenever needed, we bring them in'. Sarma maintained that voting for Congress means voting for Rahul Gandhi, and for BJP means, voting for Modi.

Addressing a press conference at Jorhat on Tuesday, Assam Congress President Bhupen Kumar Borah dismissed CM's claim and said that Sarma was playing 'mind games' to divert attention from real issue.

"I want to ask, why should I join BJP? If I join, will the six communities demanding Scheduled Tribe status for years get it? Will new jobs be created? Will landless indigenous families get land rights?" Borah asked.

Congress has fielded Premlal Ganju, a state party general secretary, against sitting MLA Dutta, who is also a former state minister and ex-BJP state president. The constituency goes to the polls in the first phase on 19 April. BJP is contesting in 11 seats out of total of 14 in the state, leaving two for AGP and one for United People's Party Liberal (UPPL). —*PTI*

Delhi court remands K Kavitha in judicial custody

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

A court on Tuesday sent BRS leader K Kavitha to Tihar jail for 14-day judicial custody in the Delhi excise policy scam case.

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja passed the order after Enforcement Directorate (ED) did not seek an extension of her custodial interrogation.

BRS leader was sent to seven-day ED custody on 16 March and it was extended by three days last Saturday. The court directed that Kavitha be produced before it on 9 April at 11am.

ED underlined that for both interim and regular bail there were stringent provisions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). During the proceedings, Kavitha's advocate Nitesh Rana sought interim bail on the grounds of her minor son's exam.

The counsel for ED countered the bail, saying even if interim bail is to be considered, Kavitha was produced by ED in a court on Tuesday on the conclusion of her custody remand in the Delhi excise policy scam case.

The federal probe agency was earlier allowed by Special Judge Kaveri Baweja to interrogate Kavitha in custody.

Speaking to reporters before entering court, the BRS leader claimed, "It is an illegal case. We will fight it out. Jai Telangana".

ED has alleged that Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was a key member of the 'South Group' that has been accused of paying the AAP kickbacks of Rs 100 crore in return for a big share of liquor licences. —*PTI*

EXCISE POLICY CASE

A photojournalist manhandled by Delhi police personnel during protest by Aam Aadmi Party over the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by Enforcement Directorate, at Delhi's Patel Chowk, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP, AAP members detained in protests over Kejri's arrest

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

At least 57 BJP members, including Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, were detained and water cannons used during its protest march here on Tuesday to demand the resignation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, according to police.

Also Punjab Minister Harjot Singh Bains and Somnath Bharti were among the scores of AAP members detained by police on Tuesday as they gathered at the Patel Chowk here to protest against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Senior BJP leader and MP Harsh Vardhan said Kejriwal has been arrested, and therefore, he should resign on moral grounds and give his responsibility to someone else. BJP workers and leaders gathered near the Ferozshah Kotla stadium and marched towards the Delhi Secretariat, carrying their party's flag and raising slogans such as "Kejriwal Sharm Karo" and "Kejriwal Istifa Do". BJP's demonstration came on a day AAP planned a march to the Prime Minister's residence on Lok Kalyan Marg for a "gherao" to protest Kejriwal's arrest. Many of the protesting AAP leaders and workers were detained at the Patel Chowk. Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure are imposed in the area and police cannot allow anyone to gather, a senior officer said. —*PTI*

Delhi HC to hear Kejri's plea against arrest today

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Delhi High Court will on Wednesday hear a petition by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam. Kejriwal's petition, which has sought his immediate release on account of the arrest and the subsequent remand to ED being "illegal", is listed for hearing before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma at 10.30 am. AAP national convener was arrested on 21 March and subsequently remanded to the ED's custody till 28 March by a Delhi court. Kejriwal had moved the high court last week with his petition but according to highly-placed sources, his request for an urgent hearing was turned down as the high court was closed for Holi.

ED arrested Kejriwal hours after the high court refused to grant him protection from coercive action by the federal anti-money laundering agency. Kejriwal had earlier approached the court for quashing and setting aside all proceedings. —*PTI*

KEJRIWAL ISSUES 2ND ORDER FROM ED CUSTODY

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has issued directions from ED custody to address the shortage of medicines and diagnostic tests at Mohalla clinics and hospitals in the national capital, Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said on Tuesday.

Sharing details of the Chief Minister's order, Bharadwaj told a press conference that healthcare in Delhi has always been Kejriwal's priority.

He said Kejriwal believes that even though he has been arrested, people of Delhi should not face any problem in getting free tests and medicines in government hospitals and Mohalla clinics.

He said Kejriwal is concerned that a poor patient should not suffer because of this.

Last week, the AAP national convener, who is in ED's custody till 28 March in the Delhi excise policy case, issued directions to Water Minister Atishi to address the water and sewer issues in some parts of the city.

At that time, sources had said the matter of issuing directions while being in custody would be looked into by ED to ascertain if it is in line with the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court's order issued to the agency and Kejriwal during his custody period.

At a meeting of legislators, councillors and office bearers of the AAP on Sunday, it was resolved that Kejriwal will continue to run the government from jail. —*PTI*

Govt's claims of creating 2 cr jobs misleading: RaGa

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

- He also said the youth have to change their destiny themselves by breaking the web of illusion created by BJP

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday accused BJP of "misleading" people on its promise of providing two crore jobs every year and said the youth across the country are asking if it lied to them.

He also said the youth have to change their destiny themselves by breaking the web of illusion created by BJP and assured that Congress has resolved to undertake an employment revolution through 'Yuva Nyay', a promise made to the youth ahead of elections.

"Narendra Modi ji, did you have any plan for employment? This question is on the lips of every youth today. In every street and village, BJP people are being asked - why was the lie told about providing 2 crore jobs every year," he asked.

Congress has been targeting BJP government on the issue of unemployment and intends to make it an issue in the Lok Sabha poll campaign.

"The Congress wants to build the future of the youth and the BJP wants to mislead them. The youth will have to change their destiny with their own hands by breaking the web of illusion. 'Employment revolution' will have to be brought in the country," Gandhi said. —*PTI*

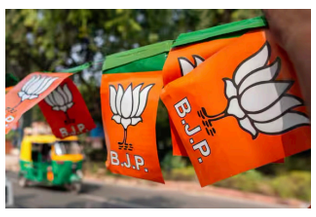


PHOTO: PTI

BJP RELEASES 2ND LIST FOR SIKKIM ASSEMBLY POLLS

GANGTOK, 26 MARCH

BJP released its second list of nine candidates for the upcoming Sikkim Legislative Assembly Elections on Tuesday.

There are 32 seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly and one Lok Sabha constituency. The list was announced following a meeting of the Central Election Committee of the party

The party has fielded Bhim Kumar Sharma from the Gyalshing-Barnyak constituency, Aruna Manger from Namchi-Singhithan, and Yogen Rai from Melli. Phurba Rinzing Sherpa will contest from Tumin-Lingee, Bhupal Baraily from West-Pendam, Pempo Tshering Lepcha from Shyari, Chewang Dadul Bhutia from Martam-Rumtek, Niren Bhandari from Upper Tandong and Pema Wangyal Rinizing from Gangtok.

The list was released by the National Secretary, Arun Singh. In its first list released on Sunday, the party announced the names of 14 candidates. Sikkim BJP President DR Thapa, the sitting legislator from the Upper Burtuk constituency, defected from the Sikkim Democratic Front party and has secured the ticket from his home constituency.

Among the other prominent candidates declared, former legislator Tseten Tashi Bhutia has been awarded the coveted Sangha seat, a non-territorial constituency for religious propagation in the state. He has been one of the biggest propagators of the protection of old laws of Sikkim. —*ANI*

'EVERY WOMAN DESERVES DIGNITY'

Cong slams comments against Kangana, BJP says will act

CHANDIGARH, 26 MARCH

Every woman, irrespective of her background and profession, deserves dignity, actor Kangana Ranaut said on Tuesday, adding that she was particularly pained by Congress leaders' comments on Mandi from where she is contesting the Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket.

Congress leaders Supriya Shrinate and HS Ahir have kicked up a huge political row with derogatory comments on Ranaut and Mandi posted on their social media handles. "Whatever be the profession of a woman, be it a teacher, actress, journalist, politician or a sex worker, all of them deserve dignity. I'm pained especially because of the deplorable comments made about Mandi... All of us who come from Mandi have been hurt by the comments," Ranaut said.

Congress said it has always believed there is no place for such language in public discourse and the matter should end with Shrinate clearing the air.

Shrinate has already clarified that someone who has access to her account made the post, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit said at a press conference.

"No place for such language in public discourse, Congress has always been clear in that.

BJP candidate from Mandi for Lok Sabha elections Kangana Ranaut arrives at BJP President JP Nadda House, in New Delhi on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

- Derogatory remarks against actor Ranaut and Mandi from where she is contesting the Lok Sabha polls on BJP ticket, would be legally examined, former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur said on Tuesday

Supriya ji has said whoever has done it, it's a mistake. She has explained and the matter should end there," he added. Derogatory remarks against actor Ranaut and Mandi from where she is contesting the Lok Sabha polls on BJP ticket, would be legally examined, former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur said on Tuesday.

"It is unfortunate that being a woman herself, Congress spokesperson has made such remarks against another woman and now she is trying to retract by saying that someone has used her other account," Thakur said.

Thakur also asked what action Shrinate has taken against those who used her account and what she has to say about the comments made by Congressmen on her tweet. Asked whether she plans to take any action against the two Congress leaders, Ranaut said she had been called to Delhi by BJP president JP Nadda and would respond only after meeting him. National Commission for Women (NCW) has written to the Election Commission demanding strict action against Shrinate and Ahir for their comments against Ranaut. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

CISCE postpones class 12 exam due to loss of papers

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

A day before the class 12 Psychology examination, CISCE on Tuesday announced its postponement citing the loss of question paper packets at one of the centres. The exam will now be conducted on April 4 at 2 PM. "One of the exam centres has reported the loss of class 12 Psychology question paper. The exam has been postponed. The centres should hand over the question papers to convenor at the earliest," the board's deputy secretary Sangeeta Bhatia said. On February 26, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) had postponed the class 12 board exam for Chemistry citing unforeseen circumstances, amid reports of question paper leak. However, the board did not confirm the paper leak.*—PTI*

4 killed after motorcycle rams into truck in UP

Mirzapur, 26 March
Four youths died when their motorcycle was hit by a truck here, police said on Tuesday. The accident took place on National Highway 35 in Samogra village under the Rual police station area on Monday night. The motorcycle was on the wrong side of the road when it was hit by a truck. The deceased were identified as Rakesh Kumar Singh,24, Sonu Prajapati,20, Pawan Prajapati,20, and Vikash Prajapati,22, said Manjari Rao, Circle Officer, Sadar. She said the truck driver has been arrested and his vehicle impounded. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination, police said.
—PTI

Mumbai youth drowns in sea, one missing, 3 resuced

MUMBAI, 25 MARCH

Holi revelry ended in tragedy for a group of five teenage boys when one of them drowned in the sea at Mahim on Monday while his friend is missing, officials said. Rescuers managed to save three others. The incident occurred on Monday afternoon when five youths went for a swim in the sea after playing Holi, between Mahim and Shivaji Park coast, an official said."Some of them entered the deep water but started drowning, seeing which their friends rushed to help," he said. Lifeguards deployed at the chowpatty near Hinduja Hospital in Mahim and Fire Brigade personnel pulled four youths out of water, he said, adding that a youth remained missing." The rescued people were rushed to Hospital where Harsh Kinjale,19 , was declared dead during treatment. Two others are unharmed while their-friend,17, is stable," he said.*—PTI*

50 rescued after fire breaks out in Mumbai building

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Nearly 50 people were rescued after a fire erupted in a six-storey corporate park at suburban Mulund in Mumbai on Tuesday morning, officials said.Those rescued had been stranded on various floors of the smoke-filled building, where the fire started around 9.25am, a civic official said. They were moved to safety through a staircase and with the help of turn-table ladders. "There are no reports of any injury to anyone so far," the official said. Another civic official said the fire is confined to the sixth floor of the building – Avior Corporate Park – on LBS Road.The fire affected wiring, electrical installations, AC units, furniture and office records of the commercial building, he said.*—PTI*

India backs Philippines amid South China Sea crisis

The duo discussed on bilateral ties of both the nations

MANILA, 26 MARCH

India firmly supports the Philippines in upholding its national sovereignty and wants to explore new areas of cooperation, including in defence and security, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday, amid Manila's maritime dispute with China in the South China Sea.

Jaishankar's remarks came at a joint press conference with his counterpart Enrique Manalo in Manila after their meeting.

"Warm and productive meeting with @SecManalo of Philippines. Wide-ranging discussion on advancing ties in political, defence, security & maritime cooperation, trade & investment, infrastructure, development cooperation, education, digital, technology, culture and consular domains," Jaishankar posted on X.

They also exchanged views on global, regional and multilateral issues including the Indo-Pacific, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), West Asia, Ukraine, Non-Aligned Movement and the UN.

"As two democracies committed to a rules-based order, look forward to intensifying our cooperation," he said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines Enrique Manalo during a meeting, in Manila, Philippines on Tuesday
PHOTO: PTI

Addressing the press conference with Manalo, Jaishankar said: "I take this opportunity to firmly reiterate India's support to the Philippines for upholding its national sovereignty."

As the world changes, it is essential that countries like India and the Philippines cooperate more closely to shape the emerging order, he said.Every country has the right to uphold and enforce its national sovereignty, he said in response to a question.

On a question on India's plans to expand the defence cooperation with the Philippines amid development in the South China Sea, Jaishankar said: "You need to look at that cooperation on its own merits. It is not necessarily linked to a particular situation."Two countries whose trust and comfort is growing so rapidly that we will look at various new areas of cooperation. And certainly defence and security is one of them," he said. *—PTI*

MODI'S CLAIMS 'NONSENSE'

Believing 'hype' about growth is a mistake: Rajan

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

India is making a big mistake believing the "hype" around its strong economic growth since there are significant structural problems that need to be fixed for the country to meet its potential, former central bank Governor Raghuram Rajan said.

The biggest challenge a new government must grapple with after elections is improving the education and skills of the workforce, Rajan said in an interview. Without fixing that, India will struggle to reap the benefits of its young population, he said, in a country where more than half of the 1.4 billion population are below the age of 30.

"The greatest mistake India can make is to believe the hype," he said. "We've got many more years of hard work to do to ensure the hype is real. Believing the hype is something politicians want you to believe because they want you to believe that we have arrived." But it would be a "serious mistake for India to succumb to that" belief, he added.

Dismissing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambition to make India a developed economy by 2047, Rajan said it was "nonsense" to talk of that goal "if so many of your kids don't have a high school education" and drop-out rates are high.

"We have a growing workforce, but it is a dividend only if they're employed in good jobs," he said. "And that's, to my mind, the possible tragedy that we face." India needs to firstly make the workforce more employable, and, secondly, create jobs for the workforce it has, he said.

Rajan cited studies showing a drop in the learning ability of Indian school children to pre-2012 levels after the pandemic, and that only 20.5% of grade three students could read a grade two text.

"That is the kind of number that should really worry us," he said. "The lack of human capital will stay with us for decades."

India needs to do a lot more work to get to 8 per cent growth on a sustainable basis, Rajan said, dampening some of the recent optimism about the economy's prospects.
—Bloomberg

CLIMATE CALL

Actor Prakash Raj celebrated his 59th birthday by joining Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk's protest in Ladakh on Tuesday
PHOTO: ANI

Hindus offer prayers as ASI survey continues at Bhojshala

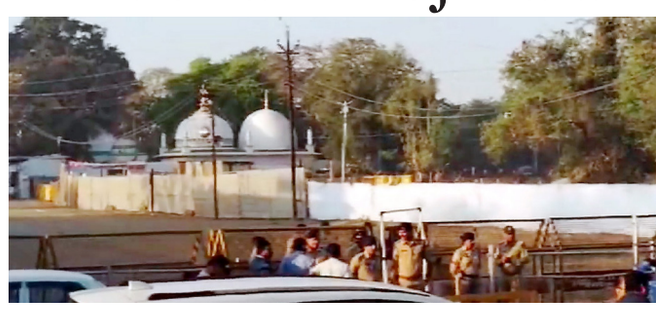
DHAR, 26 MARCH

Hindus offered prayers at the contentious Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district on Tuesday, with a team from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) continuing its court-mandated survey.

As per an ASI order of 7 April, 2003, Hindus are allowed to worship inside the Bhojshala complex every Tuesday, while Muslims are allowed to offer namaz at the site on Fridays.

Hindu devotees reached the historical complex around 7.15am before the start of the survey.

On 11 March, the Madhya Pradesh High Court directed the ASI to carry out within six weeks a 'scientific survey' of the Bhojshala complex, a medieval-era monument that Hindus believe is a temple of Goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati) and the Muslim community calls Kamal Maula Mosque.



As per an ASI order, Hindus are allowed to worship inside the Bhojshala complex every Tuesday and Muslims on Friday
PHOTO: PTI

Acting on the court directives, the ASI team, accompanied by senior police and administrative officials, on 22 March began its survey at the disputed complex in the tribal-dominated district.

Balveer Singh, vice president of Bhoj Utsav Samiti, said that the ASI survey will bring out a better solution to the dispute."This was the temple of Maa Saraswati and it will be given to Hindus and the issue will be resolved," he asserted.

It is believed that Raja Bhoj, a Hindu king, had installed the statue of Vagdevi in Bhojshala in 1034 AD. Hindu groups say the British took this statue to London in 1875
—PTI

'Medication errors are key challenge to patient safety'

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

A recent study, conducted by the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals (NABH), has highlighted medication errors as the key challenge to patient safety in the Indian hospitals.

The NABH is a constituent of the Quality Council of India (QCI) and the medication errors highlighted by it include improper labelling and dosage miscalculations, faulty medical devices, high rates of healthcare-associated infections and compromising patient safety. According to the study findings, around 58 per cent of the nurses reported feeling pressured to compromise patient safety over the efficiency of hospitals while 35 per cent of them complained of inadequate staff, and 32 per cent acknowledged poor patient safety culture for ineffective patient safety. The doctors echoed similar concerns, with 18 per cent of them claiming to be pressured to compromise on patient safety over efficiency while 21 per cent highlighted inadequate staffing as a significant challenge in the health facilities.The study conducted by the NABH in collaboration with NATHEALTH involved surveys and interviews of healthcare professionals from over 1100 NABH-accredited hospitals. The assessment of diagnostics in these hospitals highlighted inadequately trained staff, improper reporting mechanisms, limited patient understanding of safety protocols and inconsistent adherence to the established protocols. *—PTI*

CPCB report to NGT shows 80 pc environmental funds remain unutilised

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has spent only 20 per cent of the environment protection charge and environmental compensation collected so far for mitigating air pollution in Delhi-NCR and protecting the environment.

The CPCB receives compensation broadly under two heads - environment protection charge (EPC) and environmental compensation (EC).

According to a CPCB report submitted to the National Green Tribunal on 20 March, the central pollution control body has disbursed only Rs 156.33 of the total Rs 777.69 crore collected under the two heads.

The dealer/manufacturer is required to pay one per cent environment protection charge on the ex-showroom price of new diesel vehicles with engine capacity of 2000cc and above, registered only in Delhi and NCR. This is called 'environment protection charge'.

PHOTO: WEBSITE

The EPC is received as per an order of the Supreme Court and is utilized for air quality improvement and related work in Delhi-NCR such as research and development activities and vehicular pollution control, health impact studies and specific projects to control pollution in Delhi-NCR and Punjab.

The CPCB also receives 25 per cent of the environmental compensation collected by state pollution control boards. It also collects environmental penalties directly from polluters/defaulters in various matters.

The environmental compensation is received as per the orders of the NGT and is utilized to rejuvenate and protect the environment through strengthening of laboratories/monitoring network, projects and studies/monitoring in compliance of NGT orders, capacity building of pollution control boards, payment of travelling allowance/ dearness allowance/honorarium etc. to the chairman and members of NGT-constituted committees.

According to the CPCB report submitted to the NGT, the central pollution control body has collected a total of Rs 383.89 crore as environment protection charge until 3 January. *—PTI*

OUTSIDE COLOURS BANNED IN MAHAKAL TEMPLE

INDORE, 26 MARCH

Devotees will not be allowed to bring colours from outside into Madhya Pradesh's famous Mahakaleshwar temple during Rangpanchami on 30 March, the administration has said in the wake of Monday's fire.

At least 14 priests, including 'sevaks', were injured in a fire that broke out in the sanctum sanctorum of the revered Shiva temple in Ujjain early on Monday during the 'bhasma aarti' ritual."Along with Holi, the festival of colours is also celebrated in the Mahakaleshwar temple on Rangpanchami. We have decided thatTempleManagement Committee will arrange for herbal colour made from 'tesu' (palash) flowers on Rangpanchami," Ujjain District Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh told PTI on Tuesday. *—PTI*

Minor boy asked to chant religious slogan, case filed

- The incident came to light after the father of the 11-year-old boy approached the police

THANE, 26 MARCH

A 11-year-old boy was allegedly forced to chant religious slogans in Maharashtra's Thane, police said on Tuesday.

According to the Mira Road police, a First Information Report (FIR) was registered against five people in Maharashtra's Thane district for allegedly forcing another boy to raise a slogan.

The incident came to light after the father of the 11-year-old boy approached the police on Monday evening, alleging his son was forced to raise religious slogans by a group of minors.

"On the way back home at nearly 9.30pm, he said his son greeted some people with one community's slogan and moments later, a group stopped him and forced him to shout another community's slogan," according to Mira Road police.

The police said that five boys seen in CCTV have been identified and would send summons to them and record their statements.

The case has been registered against the five people, for hurting religious sentiments under IPC sections 448, 295-A, 153(1), 143, 37(1)(C), and 135. *—ANI*

APEX COURT SAYS

'Make injunctions against media exceptional'

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Courts should not grant ex-parte injunctions against publication of a news article barring in exceptional cases as it may have severe ramifications for the right to freedom of speech of the author and the public's right to know, the Supreme Court has said.

Setting aside a trial court's order directing international media group Bloomberg to take down an allegedly defamatory news article against Zee Entertainment, the top court said injunctions against the publication of material should be granted only after a fullfledged trial.

Courts should not grant ex-parte injunctions against publication of a news article
PHOTO: PTI

"The grant of a pre-trial injunction against the publication of an article may have severe ramifications on the right to freedom of speech of the author and the public's right to know," a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said.

The bench, also comprising Justices Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said an injunction, particularly ex-parte, should not be granted without establishing that the content sought to be restricted is "malicious" or "palpably false".

"Granting interim injunctions, before the trial commences, in a cavalier manner results in the stifling of public debate....In other words, courts should not grant ex-parte injunctions except in exceptional cases where the defence advanced by the respondent would undoubtedly fail at trial," the bench said. *—PTI*

HURANGA HOLI

People celebrate 'Huranga Holi' at Dauji temple, near Mathura, on Tuesday. During 'Huranga Holi', men drench women with liquid colours and women tear off the clothes of men. ***PHOTO: PTI***

Israel's use of White phosphorus is a toxic legacy

Abbas Baalbaki, an environmental chemistry researcher at the American University in Beirut (AUB), has been looking at white phosphorous dropped by Israel onto Lebanese soil for nearly six months.

Then, one day, a sample he and a colleague were looking at burst into flames.

That should not have happened. The samples had been dropped over Kfar Kila on 17 October and collected on 10 November after it had rained in the area.

They had been "spent" for nearly a month by the time Baalbaki tested them.

The white phosphorous dropped on Lebanon, Baalbaki believes, remains active, very toxic and flammable for much longer than information on the topic indicates.

Baalbaki had to switch to studying "hazardous substances, foreign substances that entered our land, our water, our soil" since Lebanon's Hezbollah and Israel began trading cross-border attacks in the wake of the latter's war on Gaza.

The white phosphorus Baalbaki is testing is among the weapons Israel has attacked Lebanon's southern villages and agricultural land with.

On 7 October, Hamas attacked Israel, killing 1,139 people, and Israel began bombing Gaza in retaliation, killing more than 32,000 people to date.

On 8 October, Hezbollah launched attacks on the Israeli-occupied Shebaa Farms, and Israel launched attacks on southern Lebanon.

By 6 March, 117 phosphoric bombs had been dropped on southern Lebanon, according to Lebanon's National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS). Attacks continue.

Israel claims it uses white phosphorus munitions to create a smokescreen on the battlefield. But in discussions about Israeli use of white phosphorus with experts in a range of domains in Lebanon, a common theory emerged: Israel is using it as part of a larger strategy to push out civilians and make south Lebanon uninhabitable, now and in the future.

Since the war began, more than 91,000 people have been forced to flee south Lebanon ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Al Jazeera has reached out to Israeli authorities seeking comment on the researchers' conclusions that their use of white phosphorous

Since the war began, more than 91,000 people have been forced to flee south Lebanon, according to the International Organisation for Migration.

Another 60,000 are still in active conflict zones, according to the UN, many of whom cannot flee due to lack of resources or lack of mobility due to old age or disability.

Many of those people, Baalbaki told Al Jazeera, now recognise the smell of white phosphorous - which is similar to garlic.

White phosphorous - a waxy, white or yellowish solid that does not occur in nature - ignites when exposed to the oxygen in the air at temperatures above 30C (86F) and rains down streaks of dense white smoke mixed with phosphorus oxides. Photographs resemble gaseous white jellyfish flying over blazing farmlands or structures.

The fiery fragments continue to burn - on vegetation, buildings, or right through human flesh - until they are fully oxidised or deprived of oxygen.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says, "In the air, white phosphorus reacts rapidly with oxygen to produce relatively harmless chemicals within minutes," while in the earth, it "may stick to particles and be changed within a few days to less harmful compounds".

Lebanese researchers and academics who are studying the effects of white phosphorus now say there is little useful data available to determine how white phosphorus will impact soil, plants and animals in the long run.

The only groups to have conducted such studies are those who provide the white phosphorus, the US military, and some of its victims, researchers from Gaza in this case.

Israel's use of white phosphorous in this war has been criticised by human rights organisations.

Israel's invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, its occupation from 1985 to 2000, and the wars between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006 and 2023-2024 have eroded the land on the Lebanese side of the border.

In October 2023, human rights groups like HRW and Amnesty International documented Israel's use of white phosphorus in dense civilian areas in Gaza and farmlands and residential zones in south Lebanon.

—Al Jazeera

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Astronomers discover 49 unknown galaxies

Stars are born from huge clouds of mostly hydrogen gas floating in space. Astronomers like me study this gas because it helps us understand how stars and galaxies form and grow.

Hydrogen gas gives off a faint glow that is invisible to human eyes but can be observed with a telescope tuned to detect radio waves.

Recently, my colleagues and I were using a telescope like this – a radio telescope called MeerKAT, in South Africa – to look for hydrogen gas in a particular galaxy. We were only observing for less than three hours, which is quite a short amount of time since the hydrogen glow is so faint.

When we looked at the results, we were in for a huge surprise. Instead of discovering hydrogen gas in the galaxy we aimed at, we spotted it in no less than 49 previously unknown galaxies. Our findings are published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

Gas in galaxies

One thing we are particularly interested in is "merger events", when two galaxies collide and merge into a single, larger galaxy. These events can also impact the gas, and kickstart star formation.

Studying gas can often help us understand a galaxy's history. Gas often extends far further out than the stars in galaxies.

When we see trails of disturbed gas, it is a classic clue that a recent galaxy merger or interaction has occurred.

MeerKAT has already achieved some great results, from detecting giant radio galaxies to studying the centre of our own galaxy, the Milky Way.

We did not find hydrogen gas in that galaxy, which was fine. We astronomers don't always find what we are looking for.

But when I inspected the MeerKAT data, I spotted some gas located away from the target galaxy. So we investigated further.

By using techniques developed for the larger MeerKAT science surveys such as LADUMA, we found a lot more gas. In total, we had 49 detections.

Meet the 49ers

Each detection of the gas in these galaxies was brand new. In little more than two hours of observing time, MeerKAT had revealed several collections of neighbouring galaxies.

Some of these neighbours are even interacting with each other, as their gas content shows. This was not at all obvious from just looking at the optical images of their stars.

In one case, a galaxy is stealing gas from two companion galaxies, and using it to fuel its own star formation.

I've informally nicknamed this collection of galaxies the 49ers, a reference to the miners of the 1849 California gold rush.

While MeerKAT took the observations containing the 49 gold nuggets in just a couple of hours, winnowing them out required several other tools. These included the ilifu cloud supercomputer, where we reduced the MeerKAT observations ("data reduction" is a kind of pre-processing that makes the raw observations useful) and a data visualisation tool called CARTA which we used for the initial discovery of the 49 new galaxies.

We also examined our data with iDaVIE-v, a virtual reality software for viewing astronomical datasets in 3D. This software has already been used for new discoveries such as polar ring galaxies.

More gold nuggets to be found

Finding 49 new galaxies in such a short amount of observation time is quite unusual, even with a telescope as powerful as MeerKAT. However, we know there are more galaxies waiting to be found in upcoming and existing MeerKAT observations.

In some other recent work, our team found traces of gas in more than 80 galaxies (most brand new) across three separate MeerKAT observations. Each of these observations was originally focused on a single galaxy, like the "open time" observation in which we found the 49ers.

What will we find next? We don't know, but with MeerKAT – and eventually its more powerful successor, the SKA telescope – we're confident astronomers will turn up plenty more pieces of gol

—BBC News

The team has found traces of gas in more than 80 galaxies across MeerKAT observation ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

US army fuels gang violence in Haiti that displaces lakhs

For years, as armed groups plunged Haiti into deeper unrest, human rights advocates and civil society groups have issued a clear demand.

Stop the flow of illicit firearms to criminal gangs — especially from the United States.

Now, as a surge in deadly gang attacks grips the capital of Port-au-Prince, their call is ringing out once more.

From handguns to semi-automatic and even military-style firearms, the range of weapons and ammunition streaming into Haiti goes largely unchecked amid weak state institutions, corruption and challenges in monitoring the country's vast coastline.

Haiti has faced years of political instability, spurred in part by foreign interventions as well as corrupt politicians and business elites who routinely use armed groups to further their interests.

But the situation worsened dramatically after the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise. The killing created a power vacuum, which in turn has heightened the influence of the armed gangs, approximately 200 of whom operate around the country.

According to the United Nations, the gangs now control approximately 80 per cent of Port-au-Prince. They have increasingly made political demands, including calling for the resignation of Haiti's unelected Prime Minister, Ariel Henry, who has promised to step down amid the pressure.

The funding for that weaponry and other gang operations comes largely from drug trafficking, kidnappings, extortion and other criminal activities. In Haiti, the UN found that more than 2,490 people were kidnapped in 2023 alone — and 4,789 homicides were reported, a 119.4 per cent increase over the previous year.

In late January, the head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Ghada Waly, addressed the proliferation of weapons in Haiti, issuing a warning to the UN Security Council.

More than 360,000 people are currently displaced by the violence, and the World Food Programme has warned that the country is facing a humanitarian crisis and the threat of famine.

There is no exact number for how many trafficked firearms are currently in Haiti.

A 2023 UNODC report (PDF) cited Haiti's National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, which estimated that there could be as many as 500,000 legal and illegal weapons in the country as of 2020.

In Haiti, 2,490 people were kidnapped and 4,789 homicides were reported, a 119.4 per cent increase over the previous year ***PHOTO: X/ @OMWAMBAKE***

But Robert Muggah — the author of the UN report and co-founder of the Igarape Institute, a Brazil-based think tank — said that, while there is no precise statistic, "most firearms and ammunition trafficked into Haiti are originally from the US".

Muggah noted that more than 80 percent of Haiti-bound weapons seized and submitted for tracing to the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) between 2020 and 2022 were made or imported from the US.

- More than 360,000 people are currently displaced by the violence, and the World Food Programme has warned that the country is facing a humanitarian crisis and the threat of famine.

This includes semi-automatic rifles "that are very popular" in the US and can employ high-capacity magazines, he explained. In recent years, weapons bound for Haiti have included AR-15s and AK-47s, for instance.

They use an ammunition cartridge, he added, "that's nearly as big as your hand".

Generally, Haiti-bound weapons that originate in the US are purchased by "straw men": individuals who buy guns from licensed dealers but conceal the fact that the purchase is for someone else.

These co-conspirators purchased at least 24 firearms — including AK-47s, AR-15s and a .50-calibre rifle — at Florida gun shops while falsely saying they were the actual buyers, the department said. The weapons were then disguised as food and household goods and smuggled into Haiti in shipping containers.

While addressing the problem is indeed a tall order, Schroeder at the Small Arms Survey said that to tackle weapons trafficking from the US into Haiti, "every link in the transfer chain" must be addressed, from firearm production to their disposal.

That means working with gun shop owners to make sure they can spot the signs of a straw-man purchase. It also means ensuring enough resources are devoted to investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases, as well as screening overseas shipments.

Schroeder also said it is critical to ensure that weapons legally exported to the region are not diverted to Haitian gangs. While addressing the problem is indeed a tall order, Schroeder at the Small Arms Survey said that to tackle weapons trafficking from the US into Haiti, "every link in the transfer chain" must be addressed, from firearm production to their disposal.

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"You've got to quell the violence in Haiti. That goes without saying. That really is an essential part," Schroeder added. "And then when Haiti is in less of a state of lawlessness, then you can start to beef up their control mechanisms."

According to Cherizard, Haiti needs a government that will refuse "to enter into collusion with the armed groups and will commit and decide to fight insecurity". The stakes, she added, could not be higher for a Haitian population "that is out of breath".

"Today, it's more than a political and insecurity crisis: It's also a humanitarian crisis. There are places that are starting to run out of water," she told Al Jazeera. "The population can't take it any more.

According to the 2023 UNODC report, while handguns sell for around $400 to $500 in the US, they can be resold in Haiti for as much as $10,000, depending on demand. In Haiti, weapons smuggling is compounded by several domestic factors, from a lack of functioning state institutions to rampant corruption and ties between gangs, politicians and businessmen *—BBC News*

Trump's social media company starts trading

WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

As Donald Trump's social media company begins trading publicly Tuesday, would-be investors might ask themselves if the stock is too pricey and potentially too volatile. Trump Media & Technology Group Corp. was acquired Monday by a blank-check company called Digital World Acquisition Corp. Trump Media, which runs the social media platform Truth Social, now takes Digital World's place on the Nasdaq stock exchange. Trump Media debuts with a stock price near USD 50 and a market value of about USD 6.8 billion. Many of Digital World's investors were small-time investors either trying to support Trump or aiming to cash in on the mania, instead of big institutional and professional investors. Those shareholders helped the stock more than double this year in anticipation of the merger going through. *—AP*

'Pak to vigorously seek US waiver for Iran pipeline project'

ISLAMABAD, 26 MARCH

Pakistan has decided to plead "vigorously" and seek exemption from potential US sanctions against the planned construction of a multi-billion dollar pipeline to import cheap gas from neighbouring Iran, the petroleum minister has said, asserting that it "can't afford sanctions" on the project. Minister for Petroleum Musadik Malik said that the government would seek exemption from US sanctions for the multi-billion-dollar Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project, the Dawn newspaper reported. "We will seek exemption from US sanctions. Pakistan cannot afford sanctions in the gas pipeline project," he told journalists during an informal chat on Monday evening. *—PTI*

UK orders to delay extradition of Julian Assange to US

LONDON, 26 MARCH

A British court ruled Tuesday that Julian Assange can't immediately be extradited to the United States on espionage charges, in a partial victory for the WikiLeaks founder. Two High Court judges said they would grant Assange a new appeal unless US authorities give further assurances about what will happen to him. The ruling means the legal saga, which has dragged on for more than a decade, will continue. The case has been adjourned until 20 May. Judges Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson said that if no assurances are filed by the US, they will grant Assange permission to appeal extradition on grounds including breach of freedom of expression, and because he might receive the death penalty. *—AP*

Malaysian store owner charged over 'Allah socks'

KUALA LUMPUR, 26 MARCH

The owners of a Malaysian convenience store chain and one of its suppliers were charged Tuesday with offending the religious feelings of Muslims after socks printed with the word "Allah" were found for sale on its shelves. Chai Kee Kan, founder and chairman of the KK Mart Group, the country's second-large chain of convenience stores, and his wife Loh Siew Mui, a company director, pleaded not guilty to charges of deliberately wounding the religious feelings of Muslims. The company has blamed its supplier for sending products the company had not agreed to stock. Religion is a sensitive issue in Malaysia, where Muslims account for two-thirds of a population of 34 million, with large ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities. *—AP*

5 Chinese among 6 killed in suicide attack in Pak

The Chinese were working on the Dasu hydropower project

ISLAMABAD, 26 MARCH

At least five Chinese nationals were among the six persons killed on Tuesday when an explosive-packed vehicle rammed into their bus in Pakistan's troubled north-western province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, officials said.

The Chinese were working on the Dasu hydropower project. Several others were injured in the incident that occurred in the Bisham area of Shangla district of the province when a bus en route from Islamabad to Kohistan was hit by a vehicle coming from the opposite direction, police said.

Senior police officer Muhammad Ali Gandapur confirmed the incident and the death toll, adding that apparently it was a suicide attack. "Five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver were killed in the attack," Gandapur told the media.

Several others were injured in the incident *PHOTO: DAWN*

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi rushed to the Chinese embassy here and met the Chinese ambassador Jiang Zaidong. He offered condolences and also assured the envoy that the Pakistan government would bring the perpetrators to justice.

President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the attack and expressed "deep grief" over the deaths of the Chinese nationals. "Anti-Pakistan elements will never succeed in damaging Pak-China friendship," he said in a statement.

Zardari also conveyed his condolences to the families of the Chinese nationals and the neighbouring government. Meanwhile, police and officials of other security agencies rushed to the scene of the attack and launched a probe into the incident. They also helped to retrieve the dead bodies. *—PTI*

REJECTS CEASE-FIRE PROPOSAL

Hamas says Israel is ignoring its key demands

JERUSALEM, 26 MARCH

Hamas has rejected the latest cease-fire proposal, accusing Israel of ignoring its core demands, which include an end to the war and a full withdrawal from Gaza.

In a statement late Monday, the militant group said it had informed mediators that it was sticking to its original position, conveyed earlier in March. It said Israel had not responded to its core demands of a "comprehensive cease-fire, an (Israeli) withdrawal from the Strip, the return of displaced people and a real prisoner exchange."

The statement came shortly after the United Nations Security Council approved a resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire and the release of all hostages held in Gaza. The vote provoked a clash between Israel and the United States, which decided not to use its veto power Monday. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cancelled a high-level delegation's planned visit to Washington.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected Hamas' demands, calling them "delusional." He has vowed to resume Israel's offensive after any hostage release and keep fighting until Hamas is destroyed. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 hostages, as well as the remains of around 30 others. More than 100 hostages were freed during a weeklong cease-fire in November in exchange for the release of 240 Palestinian prisoners.

An independent expert working with the UN's top human rights body said Monday that there are "reasonable grounds" to believe Israel is carrying out genocide in Gaza. International aid officials say the entire population of the Gaza Strip — 2.3 million people — is suffering from food insecurity and that famine is imminent in the hard-hit north.

More than 32,000 people have been killed in the besieged territory and more than 74,000 wounded, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tally. It says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. *—AP*

Hamasa in a statement said Israel had not responded to its core demands of a 'comprehensive cease-fire' *PHOTO: PTI*

MASSIVE PROTEST

Farmers with their tractors stand on a main boulevard leading up to the European Council building in Brussels on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Farmers block Brussels to protest EU policies

BRUSSELS, 26 MARCH

Dozens of tractors on Tuesday sealed off streets close to European Union headquarters where the 27 European Union (EU) agriculture ministers were planning to discuss the crisis in the sector that has led to months of protests across the bloc.

The farmers were protesting anything from what they see as excessive red tape to increased environmental measures, cheap imports and unfair trading practices. "Let us make a living from our profession," read one billboard on a huge tractor blocking a main thoroughfare.

Even if smaller than previous demonstrations, the impact on the Belgian capital was sizable during the morning rush hour, and authorities asked commuters to stay out of Brussels and work from home as much as possible.

With protests taking place from Finland to Greece, Poland, and Ireland, the farmers have already won a slew of concessions from EU and national authorities, from a loosening of controls on farms to a weakening of pesticide and environmental rules.

Earlier this month, the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, proposed weakening or cutting rules in areas like crop rotation, soil cover protection and tillage methods. Small farmers, representing some two-thirds of the workforce and the most active within the continent-wide protest movement, will be exempt from some controls and penalties under the new rules.

Environmentalists and climate activists say the change in EU policies under the duress of protesting farmers is regrettable. They say the short-term concessions will come to haunt the bloc in a generation when climate change will hit the continent even harder. Politically, the bloc has moved to the right over the past year. The plight of farmers has become a rallying cry for populists and conservatives who claim EU climate and farm policies are little more than bureaucratic bungling from elitist politicians who have lost any feeling for soil and land. *—AP*

SL economy records growth in 4th quarter

COLOMBO, 26 MARCH

After six successive quarters of negative growth, Sri Lanka's bankrupt economy is estimated to have recorded a growth of 4.5 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2023, the Central Bank announced here on Tuesday. It was only during the third quarter of 2023 that the economy recorded positive growth after six successive quarters of negative growth experienced by the cash-strapped economy. The headline inflation, as measured by the year-on-year change in the Colombo Consumer Price Index, had decelerated to 5.9 per cent in February from 6.4 per cent in January. The gross official reserves improved to USD 4.5 billion by the end of February 2024, which includes the swap facility from the People's Bank of China. Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said the reserve buildup was better than the Central Bank's expectations. "The reserve buildup was supported by considerable net purchases by the Central Bank from the domestic foreign exchange market amidst increased foreign currency inflows compared to outflows," Weerasinghe said. "The Sri Lankan rupee, which appreciated by 12.1 per cent against the US dollar in 2023, continued to show an appreciation of 6.7 per cent thus far in 2024," he said. Weerasinghe said the agreements on debt restructuring with sovereign bond-holders could be completed by June in time for the next review of the IMF bailout programme. *—PTI*

WILDFIRES IN MEXICO

A soldier works to contain wildfires in Nogales, in the High Mountains area of Veracruz state, Mexico, *PHOTO: PTI*

Senegal's new Prez pledges to fight corruption

DAKAR, 26 MARCH

Senegal woke up Tuesday to a new president-elect, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a former tax inspector and political newcomer who was released from prison just weeks ago and had inspired voters, many of them unemployed youth, with a vow to fight corruption and reform the economy.

Faye was catapulted into a presidential campaign after popular Opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who was barred from running due to a prior conviction, had backed him. As he gave his first speech as president-elect on Monday evening, it represented a dramatic rise for the 44-year-old who is due to be the youngest leader of the West African nation.

While official results of Sunday's vote were not yet available, the other front-runner — the former prime minister who was backed by incumbent President Macky Sall — had conceded defeat. Sall followed with congratulations, also naming Faye as the winner. *—AP*

- Faye was catapulted into a presidential campaign after popular Opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who was barred from running due to a prior conviction, had backed him

Hong Kong scraps early release for national security convicts

HONG KONG, 26 MARCH

Hong Kong's leader said Tuesday that prisoners convicted for serious national security crimes would not likely be granted early release under the tightened rules of a new national security law, signalling a hardening government stance against jailed political activists.

Chief Executive John Lee said the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance stipulates that people found guilty of endangering national security must not be granted remission unless the commissioner of correctional services believes the move would not be a national security risk.

Previously, inmates could have their prison sentences reduced by up to one-third for good conduct under the city's prison rules, provided they were serving terms longer than one month.

At a weekly press briefing, Lee urged residents not to defy the law. "We need to make sure everyone understands that if someone was convicted of serious national security offenses, normally there would not be remission of sentence," he said. Lee's comments came after local media, including the South China Morning Post, reported that the early release of activist Ma Chun-man, which had been scheduled for Monday, was blocked under the new national security law. The remission had been granted due to his good conduct and the blockage was the first of its kind, according to the reports, which cited unnamed sources.

The revised practice is expected to affect other activists who are jailed or undergoing trials under a similar sweeping security law imposed by Beijing four years ago to quell massive anti-government protests in 2019. Associated Press could not independently verify Ma's case. *—AP*

RESCUE MISSION ON

Cargo ship hits Baltimore's key bridge, bringing it down

BALTIMORE, 26 MARCH

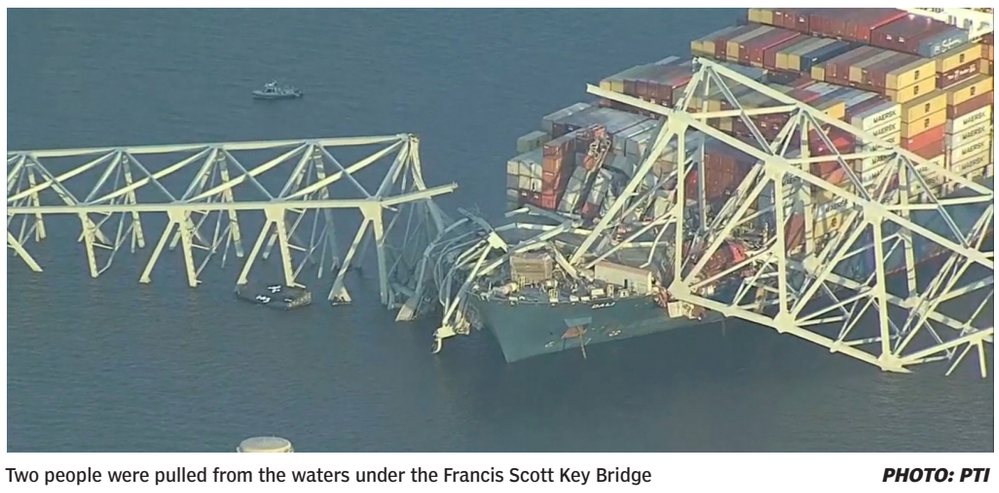
A container ship rammed into a major bridge in Baltimore early Tuesday, causing it to snap in a few places and plunge into the river below. Several vehicles fell into the chilly waters, and rescuers were initially searching for at least seven people. Two people were pulled from the waters under the Francis Scott Key Bridge, one in serious condition, according to Baltimore Fire Chief James Wallace. The cargo ship appears to have crashed into one of the bridge's supports during the middle of night when traffic would be expected to be lighter, according to a video posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. The vessel caught fire, and thick, black smoke billowed out of it.

"Never would you think that you would see, physically see, the Key Bridge tumble down like that. It looked like something out of an action movie," said Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, calling it "an unthinkable tragedy." The fire chief said authorities "may be looking for upwards of seven people" but said that number could change. It was not clear if the two rescued were included in the seven.

Sonar has indicated that there are vehicles in the water, where the temperature was about 47 degrees Fahrenheit (8 degrees Celsius) in the early hours of Tuesday, according to a buoy that collects data for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Earlier, Kevin Cartwright, director of communications for the Baltimore Fire Department, told The Associated Press that several vehicles were on the bridge at the time, including one the size of a tractor-trailer truck.

He called the collapse a "developing mass casualty event," though he didn't know at the time how many people were affected. Cartwright added that some cargo appeared to be dangling from the bridge, which spans the Patapsco River at the entrance to a busy harbour. *—AP*



Two people were pulled from the waters under the Francis Scott Key Bridge *PHOTO: PTI*

Gold falls Rs 100; silver slumps Rs 250

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Gold price fell by Rs 100 to Rs 66,850 per 10g in the domestic market on Tuesday amid weak trends in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had settled at Rs 66,950 per 10 g in the previous session. In addition, silver also slumped by Rs 250 to Rs 77,500 per kg. In the previous trade, it had closed at Rs 77,750 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 66,850 per 10 grams, down by Rs 100 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,173 per ounce, down by USD 4 from the previous close. —*PTI*

Rupee jumps 33p to close at 83.28 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

The rupee recovered from all-time low level and appreciated 33 paise to close at 83.28 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday on decline in the US dollar and positive Asian currencies. Forex traders said weak domestic markets and surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains for the local unit. At the inter-bank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.33 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.26 and a low of 83.37. The local unit finally settled at 83.28 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 33 paise from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee depreciated 48 paise to settle at an all-time low of 83.61 against the American currency. Forex and equity markets were closed on Monday on account of Holi. Market analysts said, for the domestic unit, record forex reserves provide a cushion, enabling the Reserve Bank to mitigate the rupee's downside. India's forex reserves increased by USD 6.396 billion to USD 642.492 billion for the week ended March 15, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had risen by USD 10.47 billion to USD 636.095 billion.—*PTI*

Bharti Hexacom sets price band at Rs 542-570 for IPO

JAIPUR, 26 MARCH

The initial public offering (IPO) of Bharti Hexacom will open for subscription on April 3 and close on April 5. The company has fixed a price band of Rs 542-570 per share. The anchor book of the first public issue of the new financial year FY2024-25 will be open for a day on April 2. The company aims to raise Rs 4,275 crore from the stake sale. The Bharti Hexacom IPO consists solely of an offer-for-sale (OFS) component, without any fresh issue of shares. Telecommunications Consultants India, the sole public shareholder in the company, will offload 7.5 crore equity shares or a 15 per cent stake in the OFS. —*PTI*

Avanse raises ₹1K cr from investors led by Mubadala firm

BENGALURU, 26 MARCH

Avanse Financial Services, an education-focused non-banking financial company (NBFC), on Tuesday announced that it has raised primary capital of Rs 1,000 crore to fund business growth. This round of funding was led by Mubadala Investment Company (Mubadala), the Abu Dhabi-based investment company, with participation from Avendus PE Investment Advisors Private Ltd via its fund Avendus Future Leaders Fund II, the NBFC said in a statement. The fund infusion will enable Avanse to strengthen its position in the rapidly evolving education financing segment by focusing on creating unique customer experiences and achieving sustained profitable growth, it said. —*PTI*

Markets dip on foreign fund outflows

Sensex declined by 361.64 pts to settle at 72,470

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Tuesday due to losses in index major Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank amid sustained foreign fund outflows and mixed global trends.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 361.64 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 72,470.30. During the day, it fell by 468.91 points or 0.64 per cent to 72,363.03. The NSE Nifty declined 92.05 points or 0.42 per cent to 22,004.70. From the Sensex basket, PowerGrid, Bharti Airtel, Wipro, HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, Asian Paints, Infosys and Reliance Industries were the major laggards.

Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank and Bajaj Finserv were among the gainers. In Asian markets, Tokyo settled lower, while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading mostly in the green.

Wall Street ended lower on Monday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,309.76 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Equity markets were closed on Monday for Holi. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.17 per cent to USD 86.60 a barrel. On Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 190.75 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 72,831.94. The NSE Nifty had advanced 84.80 points or 0.39 per cent to 22,096.75. —*PTI*

Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank and Bajaj Finserv were among the gainers **PHOTO: PTI**

- Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Tuesday due to losses in index major Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank amid sustained foreign fund outflows and mixed global trends.

PHOTO: X

SPICEJET INKS ₹755CR PACT WITH EXPORT CANADA

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

SpiceJet on Tuesday said it has signed a pact with Export Development Canada (EDC) to settle liabilities worth Rs 755 crore.

The liabilities stem from a loan acquired by the airline in 2011 for the procurement of 15 aircraft.

The terms of the settlement pact will allow the airline to clear major liabilities, leading to a comprehensive revitalisation of the airline's balance sheet, SpiceJet said in a statement.

Under the agreement, SpiceJet will acquire full ownership of 13 EDC-financed Q400 aircraft, bolstering the airline's operational capabilities and fleet management, it said.

SpiceJet will pay a comprehensive settlement amount to resolve outstanding liabilities amounting to close to USD 91 million, the airline said. —*PTI*

'DUMPING OF PRODUCT'

India starts probe into aluminium foil imports from China

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

PHOTO: X

India has initiated an anti-dumping probe into the import of aluminium foil, used as a packaging material for conservation and preservation of edible and food products, from China following a complaint by domestic players.

The commerce ministry's investigation arm, Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), is probing the alleged dumping of aluminium foil.

Hindalco Industries, Shyam Sel & Power Ltd, Shree Venkateshwara Electrocast, Ravi Raj Foils, GLS Foils Product and LSKB Aluminium Foils have filed the application on behalf of the domestic industry seeking the probe.

They have alleged dumping of the product from China.

The directorate, in a notification, has said that the applicants have provided prima facie evidence with respect to the injury suffered by the domestic industry because of the dumped imports.

If it is established that the dumping has caused material injury to domestic players, the DGTR would recommend the imposition of anti-dumping duty on the imports.

The finance ministry takes the final decision to impose duties.

Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt because of a surge in cheap imports.

As a countermeasure, they impose these duties under the multilateral regime of the Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO). The duty is aimed at ensuring fair trading practices and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters. —*PTI*

Adani builds largest renewable energy park

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group is building the world's largest renewable energy park in Gujarat, as it eyes a massive 45 GW capacity to generate electricity largely from solar energy.

Speaking at the opening of 'Energy Revolution: The Adani Green Energy Gallery' at the Science Museum in London, Gautam Adani said his group's renewable energy arm, Adani Green Energy, is leading an energy transition that honours the commitment of taking care of the planet not just for this generation and the next but also for generations to come.

"In Khavda, which is in the state of Gujarat, we are building the world's largest renewable energy park. It will have a generation capacity of 30 GW of energy - and it is incredibly big. Its area of 538 square kilometers is more than five times bigger than Paris," he said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

'Boeing leadership change was overdue'

VIRGINIA, 26 MARCH

Boeing boss Dave Calhoun will leave at the end of this year amid a deepening crisis over the firm's safety record.

Boeing also said that the head of its commercial airlines division will retire immediately while its chairman will not stand for re-election.

The firm is under pressure after an unused door blew out of a Boeing 737 Max in January shortly after take-off.

No-one was injured but the firm's safety and quality control standards came under renewed scrutiny.

Calhoun took on the chief executive role in early 2020 after the previous boss, Dennis Muilenburg, was ousted in the aftermath of one of the biggest scandals in Boeing's history.

Within the space of five months, two brand new 737 Max planes had been lost in almost identical accidents that claimed the lives of 346 passengers and crew.

A board member at the time, after being made boss Calhoun promised to strengthen Boeing's "safety culture" and "rebuild trust". However, in January this year a disused emergency exit door blew off a new Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max shortly after take-off from Portland International Airport.

An initial report from the US National Transportation Safety Board concluded that four bolts meant to attach the door securely to the aircraft had not been fitted.

Boeing is facing a criminal investigation into the incident itself, as well as legal action from passengers aboard the plane. Many analysts said a change in Boeing's leadership was overdue.

"A shake-up at the top is necessary," said Stewart Glickman, equity analyst at CFRA Research, adding that he believed the current crisis stemmed from problems in the firm's corporate culture that only fresh insight would be able to fix. Air safety campaigner Ed Pierson, a former senior manager at Boeing's 737 factory in Renton, Washington, said Calhoun had had years to try to boost safety at the company.

The blowout had tested Boeing's relationships with its airline customers and regulators in Washington, reviving concerns that the company's corporate culture had focused on speed of production ahead of safety. The Federal Aviation Administration said earlier this month that a six-week audit of the 737 Max production process at Boeing and its supplier Spirit Aerosystems had found "multiple instances where the companies failed to comply with manufacturing quality control requirements". —*BBC News*

PHOTO: PTI

BETTER PROSPECTS

RBI committed to transparency in finance companies, banks: S&P

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

S&P Global Ratings on Tuesday said India's financial system regulator, RBI, is showing serious commitment to improving governance and transparency in the sector.

The recent measures by the RBI will curtail lenders' over-exuberance, enhance compliance culture, and safeguard customers, but the drawback will be higher capital costs for institutions.

RBI's measures include restraining IIFL Finance Ltd and JM Financial Products Ltd from disbursing gold loans and loans against shares, respectively, and asking Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to stop onboarding of new customers.

In December 2020, RBI suspended HDFC Bank from sourcing new credit card customers after repeated technological outages, S&P said.

These actions are a departure from the historically nominal financial penalties imposed for breaches, it added.

"India's regulator has underscored its commitment to strengthening the financial sector," said S&P Global credit analyst Geeta Chugh. "But the increased regulatory risk could impede growth and raise the cost of capital for financial institutions."

According to S&P, the RBI has diminishing tolerance for non-compliance, customer complaints, data privacy, governance, know-your-customer (KYC), and anti-money laundering issues.

India's financial system regulator, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), is showing a serious commitment to improving governance and transparency at finance companies and banks, it said.

"Governance and transparency are key weaknesses for the Indian financial sector and weigh on our analysis. The RBI's new measures are creating a more robust and transparent financial system," Chugh said. —*PTI*

S&P ups India's growth forecast to 6.8% for FY25

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

S&P Global Ratings on Tuesday raised India's growth forecast for the next financial year to 6.8 per cent, but flagged restrictive interest rates as a dampener for economic growth.

The Indian economy is estimated to have clocked a growth of 7.6 per cent in the current fiscal.

In November, last year, the US-based agency had projected India's growth to be 6.4 per cent in 2024-25 fiscal on robust domestic momentum.

"For Asian emerging market (EM) economies, we generally project robust growth, with India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam in the lead," S&P said in its Economic Outlook for the Asia Pacific.

In largely domestic demand-led economies such as India, Japan, and Australia, the impact of higher interest rates and inflation on household spending power reduced sequential GDP growth in the second half, S&P said.

Restrictive interest rates are likely to weigh on demand next fiscal year, while regulatory actions to tame unsecured lending will affect credit growth.

A lower fiscal deficit will also dampen growth, it added.

It said high real policy rates will choke demand and are therefore likely to strengthen the case for lowering rates.

S&P said it forecast rate cuts of up to 75 basis points in India this fiscal. —*PTI*

LIC ASKED TO PAY ₹382 CR GST

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Insurance behemoth Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has received a GST-related demand order for Rs 382 crore from the tax authorities of Gujarat.

The demand notice covers GST dues of Rs 191 crore and a penalty of Rs 191 crore besides applicable interest, according to an exchange filing by LIC.

The demand, penalty and interest have been levied for FY'2017-18 & 2018-19.

The LIC has said there is no material impact on the Corporation's financials, operations, or other activities from this demand order.

LIC would file an appeal before the Commissioner (appeals), Ahmedabad, against the said order within prescribed timelines, the life insurer added in the filing. —*PTI*

'GROWING HATE ON X'

X loses case against hate speech watchdog

WASHINGTON, 26 MARCH

A US judge has thrown out a lawsuit brought by Elon Musk's social media firm X against a group that had claimed that hate speech had risen on the platform since the tech tycoon took over.

X had accused the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) of taking "unlawful" steps to access its data.

The US judge dismissed the case and said it was "evident" Musk's X Corp did not like criticism. X said it planned to appeal. Imran Ahmed, founder and chief executive of CCDH, celebrated the win, saying Mr Musk had conducted a "loud, hypocritical campaign" of harassment and abuse against his organisation in an attempt to "avoid taking responsibility for his own decisions".

"The courts today have affirmed our fundamental right to research, to speak, to advocate, and to hold accountable social media companies" he said, adding that he hoped the ruling would "embolden" others to "continue and even intensify" similar work.

It is a striking loss for the billionaire, a self-described "free-speech absolutist".

The company, formerly known as Twitter, launched its lawsuit against CCDH in 2023, claiming its researchers had cherry-picked data to create misleading reports about X. It accused the group of "intentionally and unlawfully" scraping data from X, in violation of its terms of service, in order to produce its research.

It said the non-profit group designed a "scare campaign" to drive away advertisers, and it demanded tens of millions of dollars in damages.

But in his decision Judge Charles Breyer said Musk was "punishing the defendants for their speech".

Judge Breyer said X appeared "far more concerned about CCDH's speech than it is its data collection methods".

He said the company had "brought this case in order to punish CCDH for ... publications that criticised X Corp - and perhaps in order to dissuade others who might wish to engage in such criticism". —*BBC News*

The US judge dismissed the case and said it was "evident" Musk's X Corp did not like criticism **PHOTO: ANI AND X/@LINDA YACCARINO**

- A US judge has thrown out a lawsuit brought by Elon Musk's social media firm X against a group that had claimed that hate speech had risen on the platform since the tech tycoon took over.

Sales of luxury homes, costing Rs 50 cr, rose 51%

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Sales of luxury homes, priced Rs 50 crore and above, rose 51 per cent in value terms to Rs 4,319 crore during the last calendar year on strong demand, according to JLL India.

Real estate consultant JLL India data showed that at least 45 homes priced Rs 50 crore and above, were sold in 2023 for Rs 4,319 crore.

During the 2022 calendar year, at least 29 homes valuing Rs 2,859 crore were sold in this price category.

JLL said that luxury transactions include both bungalows and apartments. It encompasses both primary market and resale transactions. It does not include any gift transactions and joint ventures.

"Notably, out of the 45 luxury homes sold in 2023, 14 homes were in the price segment of Rs 100 crore and above, with majority (79 per cent) of them in Mumbai," Samantak Das, Chief Economist and Head of Research at JLL India, said.

Mumbai witnessed most transactions, primarily in the Malabar Hill and Worli micro markets. Golf Links and Vasant Vihar were the top performing submarkets in terms of luxury residential sales in Delhi NCR. Gurugram also saw a couple of luxury apartment transactions.

"The surge in demand for ultra-luxury homes in the Indian real estate industry is unprecedented, fuelled by a rise in wealth creation and economic resilience among affluent segments. "This shift is driven by a newfound appreciation for real estate as both an appreciating asset and a source of tangible and intrinsic value," DLF Home Developers said. —*PTI*

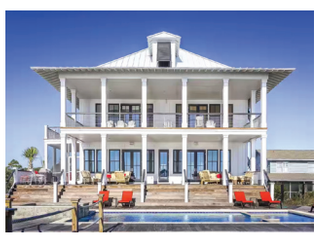


PHOTO: PTI

Both MI and SRH look to make winning comebacks

Opener Ishan Kishan back to action after a long break

HYDERABAD, 26 MARCH

Mumbai Indians will aim to land the killer punch after fluffing an easy run-chase in their opener when they meet a dangerous Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Indian Premier League here on Wednesday.

Five-time champions MI had a lot going for them in their tournament opener against the Gujarat Titans, whether it was the incisive spells from pacer Jasprit Bumrah, Dewald Brevis' impactful knock, or Rohit Sharma's fireworks at the top of the order. But MI, who has built a reputation of slow starters over the years, could not manage 48 runs off 36 balls with seven wickets in hand. With the 10-team event being more competitive than ever before, Mumbai cannot afford more such lackadaisical performances going forward.

In his first game as Mumbai captain, Hardik pushed himself down the order at number seven to accommodate the likes of Tim David and Brevis higher up.

Rishabh Pant and Shreyas Iyer **PHOTO: PTI**

Opener Ishan Kishan, back to action after a long break, could only last four balls against GT. With the T20 World Cup in mind, his performances will be tracked closely and have added significance. He needs to be at his best with the bat and behind the stumps to make the national squad.

Hardik will also be expecting an improved performance from spinners Shams Mulani and Piyush Chawla.

They face SRH on their home turf and the Pat Cummins-led side showed against Kolkata Knight Riders what they are capable of.

The big-hitting Heinrich Klaasen almost got them over the line from a hopeless situation though the rest of the batters put up below-par performances.

The opening duo of Mayank Agarwal and Abhishek Sharma has shown promise but would also need to be consistent if SRH is to do well in the competition.

SRH has invested heavily in pinch hitter Abdul Samad and it is high time he delivers on the promise.

The seasoned Bhuvneshwar Kumar was Andre "Russelled" on Saturday night and will look to bounce back strongly.

"Tough job in cricket to bowl to someone like him (Russell). It's one of those which goes one way or the other. Who would have thought we would have got that close? Unfortunately, a bit too much. Lots to be encouraged by. A couple of points to work on also," Cummins said after the narrow loss at Eden Gardens. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD vs MUMBAI INDIANS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium Hyderabad

CSK post 206-6 against GT in IPL

CHENNAI, 26 MARCH

Rachin Ravindra started with a bang and Shivam Dube finished with a flourish as Chennai Super Kings posted a commendable 206 for 5 against Gujarat Titans in an IPL match here on Tuesday.

Rachin made full use of the Powerplay, racing to 46 off 20 balls while Dube, a nightmare for spinners, then used his long levers to whack 51 in only 23 deliveries to increase the challenge of GT batters by manifold.

Dube's innings had as many as five sixes. In between, skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's chiseled 46 off 36 balls also was a significant contribution to another impactful batting performance by the team on a hard bouncy track that was on offer.

Not to forget CSK's Rs 7.60 crore recruit Sameer Rizvi (14 off 6 balls), who pummelled Rashid Khan (2/49 in 4 overs) for two sixes to mark a memorable IPL debut. Rachin, who has already become a darling of the CSK fans, enthralled all and sundry with his audacious stroke play.

Rachin Ravindra started with a bang and Shivam Dube finished with a flourish as CSK posted a commendable 206 for 5 **PHOTO: PTI**

While he missed out again on a half-century but team's 'spiritual skipper' Mahendra Singh Dhoni would be all smiles knowing that his choice was perfect for the T.

The three sixes a flick behind the square one over long-on off the normally profligate Umesh Yadav and one-off Azmatullah Omarzai were hit with so much disdain that it did put Gujarat Titans in a spot. *—PTI*

Sunil Chhetri felicitated ahead of landmark 150th match

GUWAHATI, 26 MARCH

Indian football star Sunil Chhetri was felicitated by the All India Football Federation (AIFF) for appearing in his 150th international game in the 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifier against Afghanistan here on Tuesday.

Chhetri marked the occasion with a goal from the spot in the 37th minute. This was his 94th international goal and he remains third on the list of goal-scorers among active players.

AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey, Assam Football Association secretary Sangrang Brahma, and AIFF's technical committee chairperson I.M. Vijayan were among the dignitaries who presented mementos to India captain Chhetri before the start of the match at the Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium.

Indian Football team captain Sunil Chhetri being felicitated before the FIFA World Cup 2026 **PHOTO: PTI**

- Lower-ranked Afghanistan shocked India 2-1 as the home team suffered one of its most embarrassing defeats in recent years

Chhetri, 39, first donned the senior national jersey on 12 June, 2005, in a friendly match against Pakistan in Quetta. *—PTI*

Rohan Boppana and Matthew **PHOTO: PTI**

ROHAN-MATTHEW ADVANCE TO THE QUARTER-FINALS

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

Indian tennis player Rohan Boppana and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden moved to the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Miami Open with a hard-fought win against Hugo Nys and Jan Zielinski here.

Top seeds Bopanna and Ebden toiled for one hour 39 minutes before pulling off a 7-5 7-6 (3) win over Monegasque Nys and Poland's Zielinski in the second round of the ATP Masters 1000 on Monday night. The 43-year-old Bopanna and Ebden will take on Australia's John Patrick Smith and Netherlands Sem Verbeek. The reigning Australian Open champions hit four aces and won 84 percent (37/44) of their first serve points.

The match was contested on an even keel. Bopanna and Ebden broke Nys and Zielinski in the 11th game to take a 6-5 lead. They then fought off a late challenge, saving a couple of break points before taking the 12th game and the opening set. There was not much separating the two pairs in the second set as well with both of them holding serve till 6-6 to take the match to the tiebreaker. But a double fault by Nys and Zielinski led to their downfall as the Indo-Australian duo capitalized on it to take the set and the match. *—PTI*

SL to host Women's Asia Cup 2024; India, Pak in same group

DUBAI, 26 MARCH

The Asian Cricket Council (ACC) announced the upcoming Women's Asia Cup 2024, scheduled to take place in Dambulla, Sri Lanka, from 19th July to 28th July, 2024.

Defending champions India have been placed in Group A alongside Pakistan, UAE, and Nepal in the upcoming Women's T20I Asia Cup 2024, which is scheduled to take place in Dambulla, Sri Lanka, from 19 to 28 July.

This edition of the tournament will feature eight teams, one more than the previous edition in 2022, indicating the growing interest and participation in women's cricket across Asia.

Group B will include Bangladesh, hosts Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Thailand, as per the schedule announced by the Asian Cricket Council here on Tuesday.

"The Women's Asia Cup 2024 underscores the ACC's commitment to promoting women's cricket in the region. We are excited to see the increased participation and competitiveness among the teams, reflecting the growing popularity and importance of women's cricket," said ACC President Jay Shah in a statement on Tuesday.

"This expansion, from six teams in 2018 to seven in 2022, and now eight, is a testament to our commitment to the women's game and the burgeoning talent pool in Asian cricket. We anticipate an exciting tournament that will inspire both players and fans," Shah added.

"The Women's Asia Cup has become a significant event in the ACC calendar, providing a platform for women cricketers to showcase their skills and passion for the sport. *—AP*

ALL INDIA CCI BILLIARDS CLASSIC

Jambusaria, Agrawal make winning starts

MUMBAI, 26 MARCH

CCI's seasoned cueist Nikhil Ootam outsmarted Akshay Gogri 500-429 in the opening Group-D match of the All India CCI Billiards Classic 2024 here on Tuesday.

Ootam, despite lack of match practice, put to good use his vast experience as he capitalized on every opportunity to stitch together small breaks and managed to put them across his younger rival.

Ootam had one solitary substantial break of 64, while the upcoming talent Gogri had two decent runs of 59 and 50.

Rohan Jambusaria and Aditya Agrawal won their respective group matches.

Producing a consistent performance, Jambusaria constructed a century break of 157 and five substantial breaks for a 697-312 win against Rishabh Kumar in Group F.

Besides the three-figure effort, Jambusaria rolled in breaks of 99, 71, 65, 64, and 58 to cruise to victory.

Kumar had a decent run of 57 in the match.

Agrawal compiled a break of 199 initially, which set the tone for his win against Maharashtra number one Mahesh Jagdale by a 645-391 margin in Group C. *—PTI*

Rohan Jambusaria **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PTI

Sathiyan jumps 43 places to reach 60th spot

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

Leading Indian table tennis player G Sathiyan on Tuesday leapfrogged 43 places to 60 while Sreeja Akula rose to a career-high 40 in the ITTF World Rankings, following their WTT Feeder Series title wins last week. Sathiyan, who has a career-best ranking of 24, had dropped out of the top 100 recently. The title in Beirut earned him 125 points. Veteran Sharath Kamal, who has dropped a place to be 35, continues to be the top-ranked Indian. Manav Thakkar and Harmeet Desai also find themselves in the top 100. Manav, who reached the men's doubles final in the WTT Feeder last week, has moved 11 spots to 63, while Harmeet has dropped two places to 67. Like Sathiyan, the 25-year-old Sreeja who won her second WTT singles career title on Sunday. Manika Batra held on to her 38th spot in the women's singles rankings while Archana Kamath advanced 13 places to 99. India has already qualified for the team events at the Paris Olympics. *—PTI*

India-Australia series to begin in Perth on 22 Nov

MELBOURNE, 26 MARCH

The blockbuster five-match Test series between India and Australia will get underway at Perth's Optus Stadium on 22 November, the venue replacing Adelaide Oval as the national cricket board's preferred choice for the season opener. The series will then move to Adelaide for the day-night pink-ball Test from December 6-10, followed by Brisbane (14-18 Dec) and Melbourne for the traditional Boxing Day Test (26-30 Dec). The rubber will conclude with the New Year's Test in Sydney from 3-7 January. These matches from the high-profile series are part of next summer's international schedule released by Cricket Australia (CA) on Tuesday. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Haryana crowned champions at boxing Sub Junior

GREATER NOIDA, 26 MARCH

Haryana clinched the team titles in both the boys and girls categories with an impressive combined haul of 19 medals at the boxing Sub Junior National Championship. Haryana, the reigning champions in the girl's section, successfully defended their title after finishing at the table with 64 points. They won 10 medals including seven gold, one silver, and two bronze. Haryana boxers stamped their authority with a dominating display as six out of seven boxers won comfortably with unanimous 5-0 decisions. Diya (61kg) continued her phenomenal form with a convincing 5-0 win over Delhi's Yashika. She was also adjudged the best boxer. The other gold medallists for Haryana in the girls category were Bhoomi (35kg), Nischal Sharma (37kg), Rakhi (43kg), Naitik (52kg), Navya (55kg) and Sukhreet (64kg). Delhi and Maharashtra finished second and third with 34 and 31 points respectively. Boxers from Delhi won one gold, three silver, and four bronze medals while Maharashtra ended their campaign with a gold. *—PTI*

TRAINING CAMPS FOR SREEJA, TULIKA

MOC approves financial assistance for Punia

NEW DELHI, 26 MARCH

The Sports Ministry on Tuesday approved wrestler Bajrang Punia's request for financial assistance and also extended the tenure of his strength and conditioning coach Kazi Kiron Mustafa Hasan till the end of May even though he is out of contention for the Paris Olympics this year.

Punia, who is part of a long-standing protest against the Wrestling Federation of India for alleged sexual harassment of women grapplers by its former President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, had failed to finish in the top four of the 65kg category at the recent trials to pick the squads for the Asian Championships and the Asian Olympic Qualifiers next month.

"Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) also approved wrestler Bajrang Punia's proposal for financial assistance and extension of service of his strength and conditioning expert Kazi Kiron Mustafa Hasan till the end of May 2024, when final selection trials for the Paris Olympics will take place," the ministry stated in a press release without specifying the amount approved for him.

As per the selection criteria, the top four in all the Olympic weight categories will take on the quota winner in the final selection trials to decide who will represent India at the Games.

Bajrang Punia, Tulika Mann, Sreeja Akula **PHOTO: PTI**

Another protesting wrestler, Vinesh Phogat, has kept herself in contention in the 53kg category by finishing inside the top four at the recent trials while cutting the Asian qualifiers in the 50kg division.

- Punia, who is part of a long-standing protest against the Wrestling Federation of India for alleged sexual harassment of women grapplers by its former President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh

Apart from the 30-year-old Punia, the MOC also approved Commonwealth Games champion table tennis player Sreeja Akula's request for financial assistance to train in Chinese Taipei ahead of the Olympics.

Sreeja, who won the mixed doubles gold at the 2022 CWG in Birmingham along with veteran Sharath Kamal, will train under coach Liu Jun-Lin for 12 days.

"..during her stay, she will also spar against various other paddlers at the club," Ministry said in a media release.The MOC also approved judoka Tulika Mann's request for financial assistance for participation in a Grand Slam event in Antalya, Turkey followed by training camp at the same location. Besides foreign training, MOC also approved proposals for financial assistance to participate in competitions for table tennis players Manav Thakkar. *—PTI*